

The entire page is framed by a complex, ornate gold border. The border features a central rectangular frame with a double-line gold border. The corners and sides of this frame are decorated with intricate geometric patterns, including triangles and diamonds, filled with a repeating floral or leaf motif. The background of the page is a solid dark blue.

ADVENT GUIDE

TEXAS BAPTISTS

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HO



HOPE

a long-awaited savior
Matthew 1:23

Dec 01

Revelation 22:12-13

As we enter this Advent season, we are reminded of the hope that comes with the anticipation of Christ's return. Recently, I watched an episode of a popular television show, 9-1-1, where a distressed caller sought urgent help, feeling trapped and surrounded by danger. With fright in their voice, the distressed caller said, "Please hurry." The operator responded, "Help will be there soon. I will stay on the line until they get there." The operator's calm assurance, "Help is on the way," resonates deeply with our own experiences of distress and uncertainty. In our lives, we often find ourselves similarly surrounded by challenges and wickedness, longing for rescue.

In Revelation 22, John paints a vivid picture of the future—a new heaven filled with life-giving rivers and healing leaves. Despite the reality that good and evil will coexist until the end of time, John offers believers enduring hope. Jesus' words verses 12 and 13 remind us that even in our darkest moments, we can hold on to our faith.

"Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."

Three Promises of Hope

Jesus is Coming Soon: While we may wish for His arrival to be immediate, we can take comfort in the assurance that He is on His way. Anticipating His return helps us remain steadfast, trusting in His faithfulness. His timing may not align with our desires, but we can be assured that He always arrives just when we need Him.

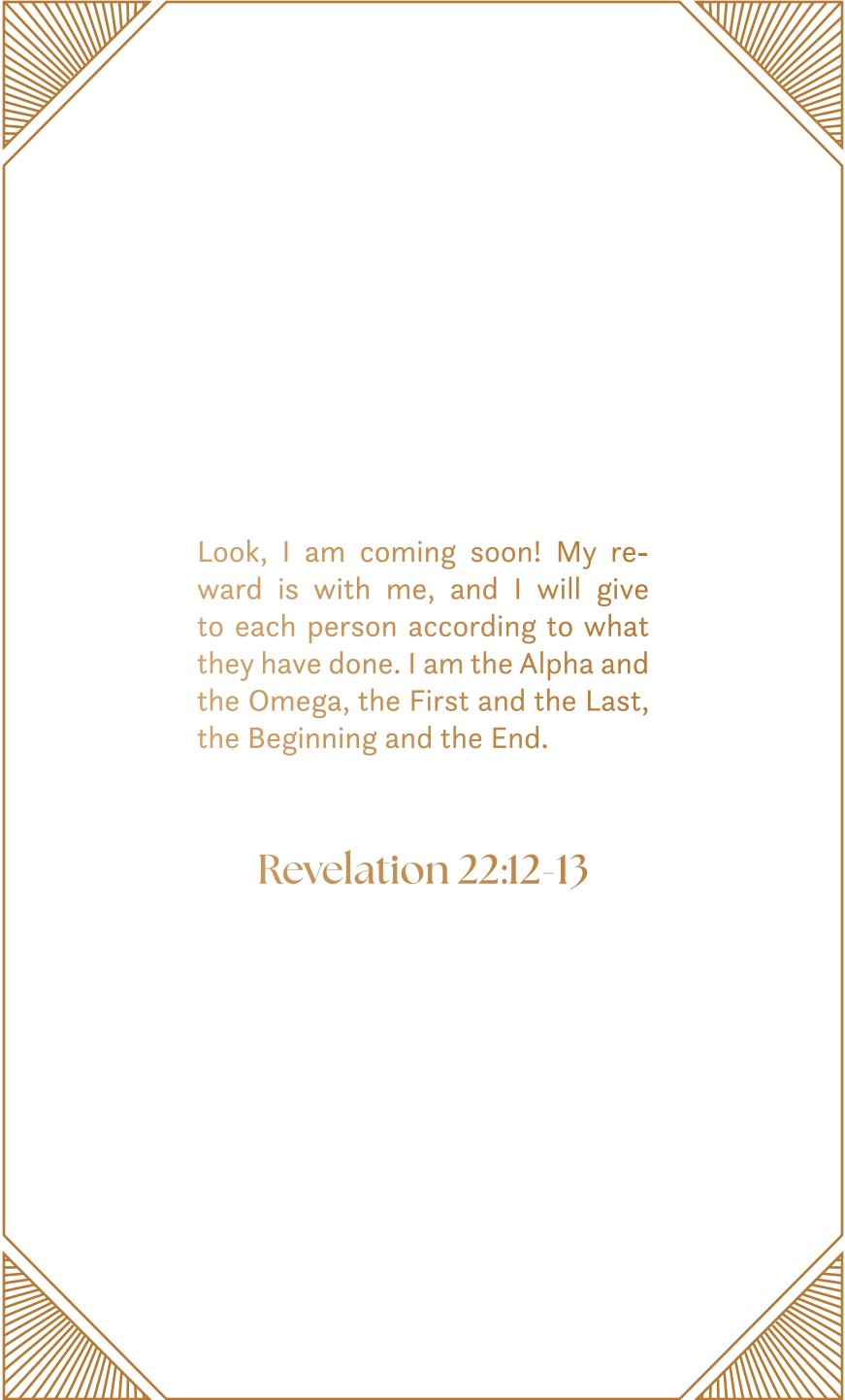
A Reward Awaits: When Jesus returns, He will reward each person according to their deeds. For those who have remained steadfast in righteousness, the reward is glorious. This promise serves as a beacon of hope, reminding us that our faith and perseverance will not go unnoticed. We can trust in His justice, knowing that He repays evil for evil, allowing us to let go of our grievances.

Our Redeemer is Coming: Ultimately, Jesus will come as our rescuer, transporting us from a world filled with sin and suffering to a beautiful, sinless eternity prepared for us. In our struggles, we hold onto the hope that one day we will be with Him, free from pain and heartache.

As we reflect during this Advent season, let us remember the operator's words: "Help is on the way." Amid the trials we face, hope is not lost. We can look forward with great anticipation to His return, confident that He is watching over us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as we await Your return, fill our hearts with hope and anticipation. Thank you for Your watchful care over us during this season. Amen.

Written by Ira Antoine



Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

Revelation 22:12-13

Dec 02

Luke 1:67-80

When our children were young, my husband would create new, whimsical songs to sing to our babies. Inspired by the wiggles and giggles of the moment, his words and warm affection brought smiles and a unique bond that transcends to this day. These were sweet moments that left an indelible imprint on my heart. It was a gift to see my doting husband and our children's sweet responses. His songs were an outward expression of his love for his children.

Zechariah was the High Priest, and at one of the greatest moments in his career, he bore the weight of being childless (Luke 1:5-7). When he was chosen to offer the incense at the Holy of Holies, he had no idea that God was preparing to choose him for another role. His new role would be to father a son, who would serve as the forerunner of Christ. His child would go "before the Lord" and prepare the way for the Messiah (vs 1:17). That day at the altar, God was giving Zechariah a new song. Even though this High Priest had no words, God was orchestrating a new song.

Luke 1:67-80 is known as the Benedictus or the Song of Zechariah. Benedictus is the Latin word for blessing and is divided into two distinct parts: 1. description of the coming Messiah (vs. 68-75) and 2. description of the forerunner (vs. 76-79). Zechariah's song acknowledges both. In the 4th century, the Benedictus served as a hymn in Eastern and Western cultures, and its purpose was to offer hope and to celebrate God's blessings.

Throughout the course of history, humanity has longed for hope and blessing. In this passage, Zechariah was at a unique juncture in his life. For months, he had no words and could not speak or hear (vs. 62). When his son was born, his lips were free, and the words came as a new song and proclamation. Imagine Zechariah holding this child in his arms, celebrating God's provision in his life and acknowledging that God ordained this baby for a unique purpose. John the Baptist would grow up and pave the way for the coming of Christ. He would not only proclaim hope, but he would also admonish sin, encouraging people to repent and prepare their hearts for the coming Savior. John the Baptist would be met with warm reception and harsh resistance. Zechariah inherently knew this in his heart as he gazed at his new baby, relishing the fact that God had not only blessed him with a child, but also that this child was called for a purpose.

As parents, we all have a song to share with our children. When we don't have words, God does. We are part of God's narrative of salvation, the hope that was fulfilled in Christ. Our children may not be the forerunner of Christ as John the Baptist, but they are each uniquely gifted to serve God and point others to Jesus, to "give light to those who sit in darkness" (vs. 79). We are all part of God's narrative and recipients of his salvation. We too have a new song to sing with words that only God can inspire.

Written by Jennifer Howington

His father Zechariah was filled with the
Holy Spirit and prophesied:

“Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and
redeemed them.

He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David
(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),
salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—
to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,
the oath he swore to our father Abraham:
to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,
and to enable us to serve him without fear
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, my child,
will be called a prophet of the Most High;
for you will go on before the Lord
to prepare the way for him,

to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,
because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven
to shine on those living in darkness
and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

And the child grew and became strong in spirit;
and he lived in the wilderness
until he appeared publicly to Israel.

Luke 1:67–80

Dec 03

Matthew 1:22-23

Another biblical name for Jesus is “Immanuel”, which means “God with us.” Now, what does this mean to us in 2025? First of all, the one true God became a man. This allowed him to experience temptation, weakness and pain, so that when we come to him in times of need, he understands us and helps us (**Hebrews 4:15-16**). Second, because he is with us, we can have a personal and close relationship with him. God is not just in heaven where we cannot reach him or connect with him. He is closer to you than your own heart, knocking at its door for you to let him in or give him full control of your life. Will you? (**Revelations 3:20-21**) And thirdly, because He’s Immanuel, He is with you always and will never leave your side (**Joshua 1:9**).

No matter what you’re going through today, do not forget that Jesus understands what you’re going through. He’s close to you, waiting for you to surrender to him, and He has promised to never leave you or forsake you. Hope in him, no matter how dark and hopeless things seem. Unlike others, Immanuel will not disappoint.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you that you understand what I’m going through and that you’re close to me. Help me grow in my relationship with you, so that I may not lose hope no matter how hard things get. I praise you because you never disappoint.

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

Matthew 1:22-23

Dec 04

Matthew 6:19-21

As a child, was there ever a gift you desperately wanted for Christmas—something you were convinced you couldn't live without? For some, it might have been their first smartphone. For others of us, maybe an actual phone with a cord!

Did you ever get it? And if you did... was it really everything you hoped for?

For me, it was the original Nintendo Entertainment System. Back then, video games were very different than they are today. In the 1980's you couldn't save your games midway through, so every time you played, you started over. And when a game started glitching? We all knew the fix—take it out, blow inside the cartridge, and somehow it magically started working again.

One Christmas, I was so sure my brother and I were getting a Nintendo that I could hardly imagine life without it. And that morning—there it was! I remember thinking it was the best gift I'd ever received.

When I first unwrapped that game system, it felt like the greatest gift in the world. I spent hours lost in it, completely engrossed, and couldn't imagine anything better. But as time passed, its importance slowly faded. When 'new' systems like the Genesis and PlayStation arrived, the Nintendo didn't hold the same magic anymore, and I eventually sold it. Looking back, it's funny how something that once seemed so significant can become just a memory.

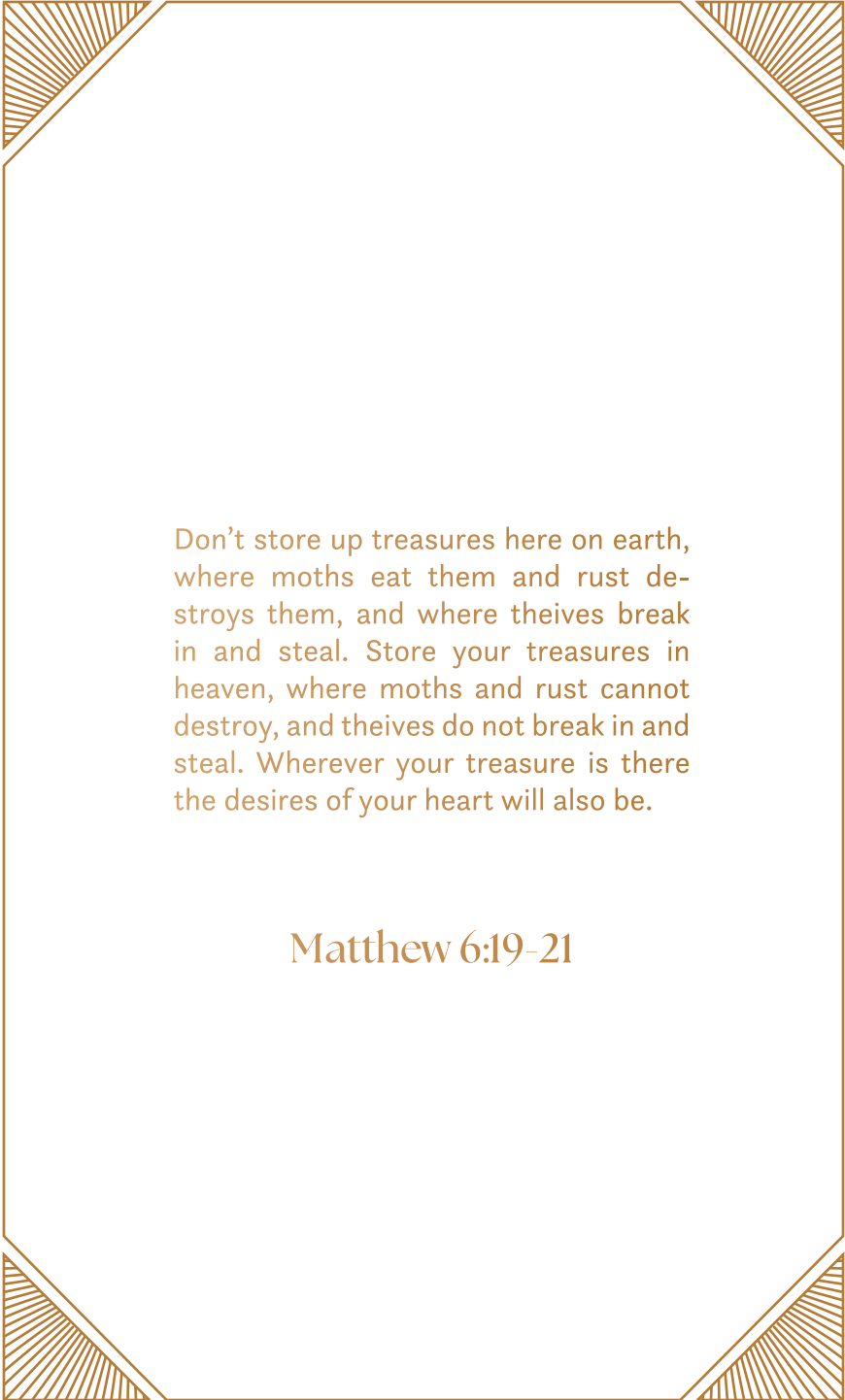
I bet you can think of your own version of that gift—the one you just had to have. Where is it now? Maybe you sold it or gave it away. It's funny how the things we once hoped for so deeply end up forgotten.

But what about the hope we hold today? It might not be a video game system like mine once was—it could be your job, your status or your family. The question is, how much do we rely on these things when life gets uncertain?

Jesus warned us about this very thing: *"Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be."*—Matthew 6:19–21 (NLT)

Everything on earth eventually fades away or is destroyed. But the hope that Jesus offers never does. The gifts at Christmas can sometimes mask the true gift of Hope that God gave us through the birth of Jesus. He is the treasure that lasts, the gift that never loses its worth, and the hope of the world who came to bring life that never ends. As we celebrate this season, may we find our hope not in the gifts we hold, but in the God who holds us close.

Written by Cory Liebrum



Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is there the desires of your heart will also be.

Matthew 6:19-21

Dec 05

Luke 2:1-7

Hopelessness was the order of the day. How could Mary not be overwhelmed?

Worldwide, Caesar Augustus demanded to count people like cattle to boost tax revenue, a painful reminder that Rome occupied and ruled her homeland. Hopelessness reigned.

“Home” had changed drastically in recent months. Her surprising pregnancy stunned her parents and shocked her small village of Nazareth. She was shunned by friends and acquaintances alike; she became the subject of shameless speculation. With her future in the balance, her beloved Joseph weighed his rights in light of her apparent moral indiscretion. Only an angel’s counsel convinced him to spare her life and continue their relationship. Hopelessness permeated.

The decreed census brought the need to accompany Joseph to his ancestral home in Bethlehem, where Mary knew no one. Nine months pregnant, the ninety mile trek would take a full week. Would they arrive before the baby comes? Would she deliver along the way? What would they find when they arrived? Hopelessness rose palpably.

Reaching their destination, absolutely no place was available. The baby’s impatient movements certainly gave Mary cause for despair. Finally, a stranger’s kindness offered access to a stable, where animals were sheltered and fed. Far from mother and friends, surrounded by the filth and squalor of a donkey stall, she would face labor and delivery with only Joseph to assist. Could it be more miserable? More frightening? Hopelessness peaked.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger . . . (Luke 2:6-7 NIV)

Hope was born! Hopelessness vanished as Mary recalled the words of the messenger from God: “You are to call him Jesus . . . His kingdom will never end . . . He will be called the Son of God.” (Luke 1:31-35 NIV). Before sunrise, shepherds showed up, telling of the amazing announcement of the angel that Messiah had been born and would be found wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. The message: This child was God’s good news to a world that lived in hopelessness. The Savior had come, prompting joy and bringing peace to all who receive God’s grace—His favor offered to all people. Hopelessness was vanquished.

Years later, as Dr. Luke was researching his account of “all that Jesus began to do” (Acts 1:1 NIV), meeting with Mary would have been essential. Can you imagine hearing all that “Mary treasured up and pondered in her heart?” (Luke 2:19 NIV)

Just as hope was born in the midst of Mary’s absolute hopelessness, God’s hope can be born to you today. His name is Jesus: He is Savior; He is Lord. His presence changes everything!

Written by Jerry Carlisle

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

Luke 1:1-7

Dec 06

Romans 8:23-25

We live in a time of uncertainty for many, for various reasons. I am grateful to God that He has given us a reason to hope for a promising future, an eternal future with Him. The scripture assures us that the Spirit groans within us, symbolizing the deep longing and anticipation of the fulfillment of God's promises, similar to birth pains, that grow and intensify, then culminate in the appointed time. When it does, we will be with our King and Lord.

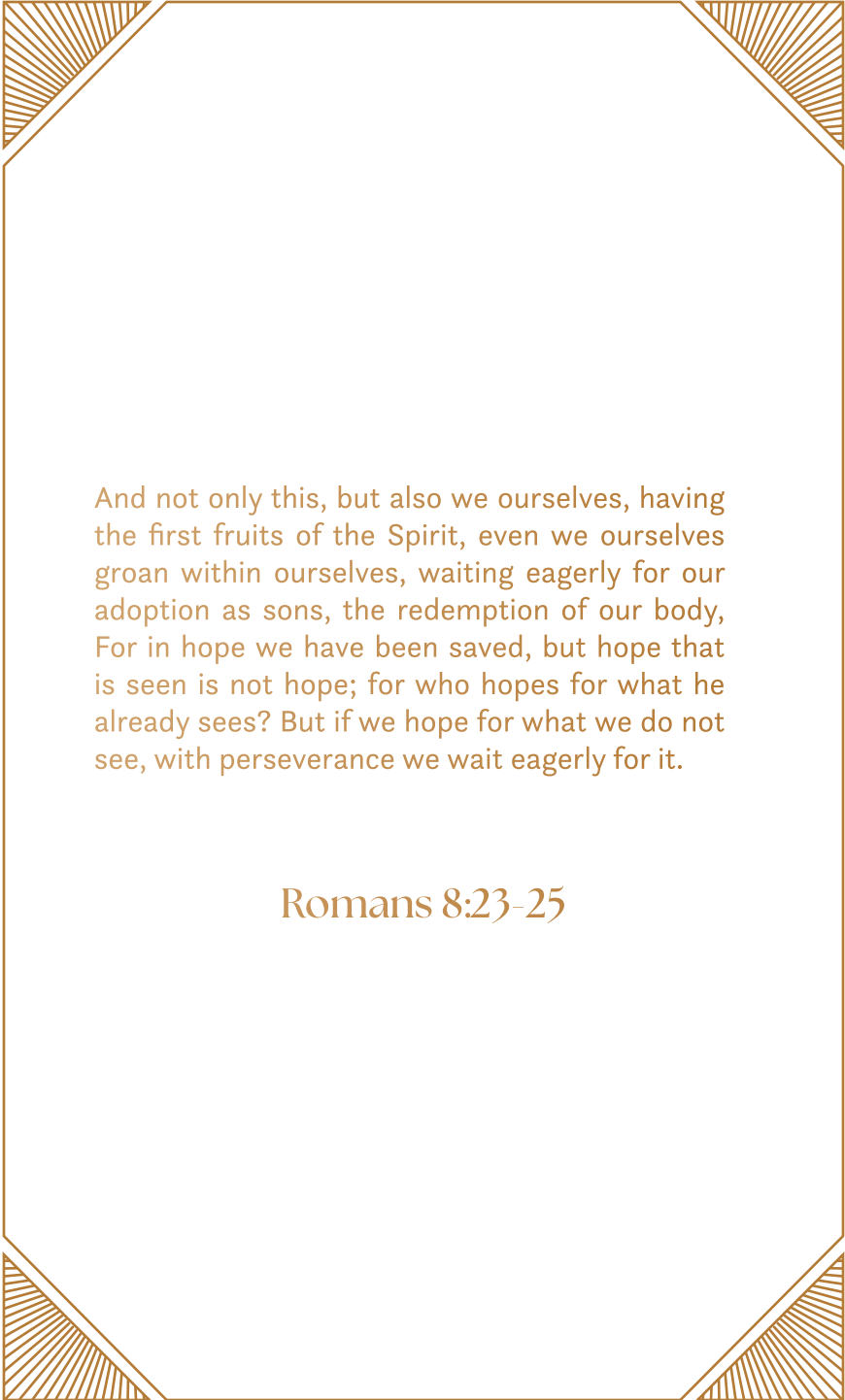
My grandchildren are the first post-Christian generation, attempting to experience life by their own rules and without the leading of the Holy Spirit, and determining their own way. I am saddened for them. I want them to experience the joy of the Lord as I do. However, I hope for their future and believe what Romans 11:16 says: "if the root is holy, so are the branches" -- first the Jews, then the Gentiles. Jesus is the hope of our salvation. I will not need to hope for my grandchildren's salvation if I saw the fruit now; that would not be hope. But I wait in hope; the only true hope through Jesus Christ. I will remain hopeful with joy, with a deep sense of happiness and contentment, exhibiting anticipation, feeling excited and eager, knowing that hope in Christ is real and very sustaining.

What and whom do you have hope for? And in whom have you placed such a precious opportunity? May it be Jesus alone. Trust Him with your personal cares, your family, work, and every aspect of your life. Eagerly lean into waiting in His Spirit. He has come, and He will come again. In the meantime, rest in Him, and He will give you peace.

Dear Heavenly Father,

We thank you for the gift of hope. Help us to wait in faith with the peace that passes all understanding through Christ Jesus. We know you love us beyond our comprehension, and we relish Your love and care for us. Thank you for caring about what we care about and those we love. You are marvelous and magnificent in all Your ways. Teach us to walk in the fruit of the Spirit, the qualities that the Holy Spirit produces in the lives of believers, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, and empower us to always magnify Your Son. We offer this prayer in the wonderful name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Written by Bennye Bryant



And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body, For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

Romans 8:23-25



PEA



ACE

A promised comfort
Isaiah 9:6

Dec 07

Romans 5:10

The word “enemy” leaves a bad taste in my mouth. And yet, it can accurately describe a reality when considering Oxford Dictionary’s definition, “a person who is actively opposed, or hostile, towards someone or something.” As distasteful as it may be, we were once enemies of God...not because of his actions, but ours!

Replicating the original sin, I lived too long trying to be my own god in opposition and resistance to God’s will. While an enemy of God, peace could not be found. I’m generally not a fan of bumper sticker theology, but I do appreciate this reminder: No God, no peace. Know God, know peace.

When Jesus came to earth as the Prince of Peace, he paved the way for reconciliation with God. This reconciliation not only brings us from spiritual death to spiritual life, but in doing so, transforms us from God’s enemies to his heirs and co-laborers in his purpose. We no longer oppose God’s will, but seek to live in it!

This should also give us a changed perspective. As former enemies of God, we should see the potential for change in all current enemies of God, for it is only by God’s grace that we have been reconciled. Therefore, our goal is not to defeat unbelievers but help them to be reconciled to God.

The peace of God is such a beautiful gift. It enriches life beyond all treasure. By it, the Holy Spirit works to guide and direct our steps. And with it, God gives further evidence of his seal upon us.

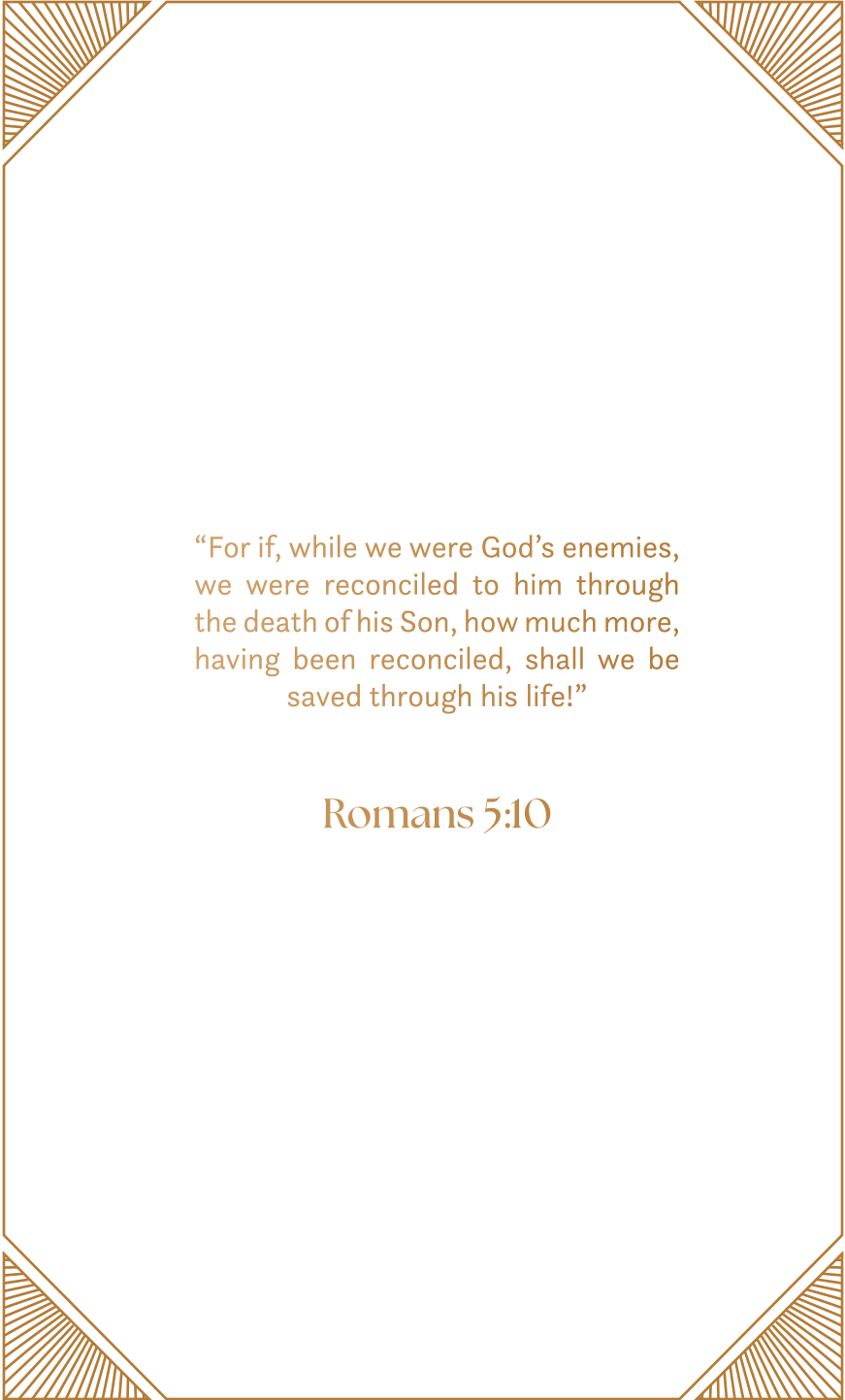
Will you pause for a moment and reflect on the beauty of God’s peace?

Express your deep appreciation for it to your Heavenly Father, and to Jesus for his sacrifice that made it possible.

Will you also express your commitment to be His agent of peace, helping to reconcile others to Him?

Until the Prince of Peace returns in glory...

Written by Ward Hayes



“For if, while we were God’s enemies,
we were reconciled to him through
the death of his Son, how much more,
having been reconciled, shall we be
saved through his life!”

Romans 5:10

Dec 08

Luke 2:14

We need peace. Yet peace can feel so far away. We long for it in our homes, communities, and nation. We need economic peace, mental and emotional peace, social and family peace. Every part of life seems to cry out for it.

The world Jesus entered was no less divided. Rome controlled the land. People lived with tension, oppression and fear. Into that world, the angels announced the birth of the Savior with a single, powerful message: peace on earth.

The first people to hear that message were shepherds: ordinary, overlooked, working-class men. To them came Heaven's good news: the Messiah had been born. Some expected this Messiah to bring national strength and political power, but God's plan was different. He came not to overthrow nations, but to bring peace to hearts.

There are two ways people have read the angels' words. Some hear "peace on earth to people of goodwill," as if peace is earned by good behavior. More commonly today, it's understood as "peace on earth to those God favors," pointing to the grace of God given through Jesus. Peace is not earned. It is given to those who receive the Savior.

This peace is **practical**. It speaks directly to the human heart, removing the guilt and stain of sin. It quiets the voice of shame, offering forgiveness that is complete and final.

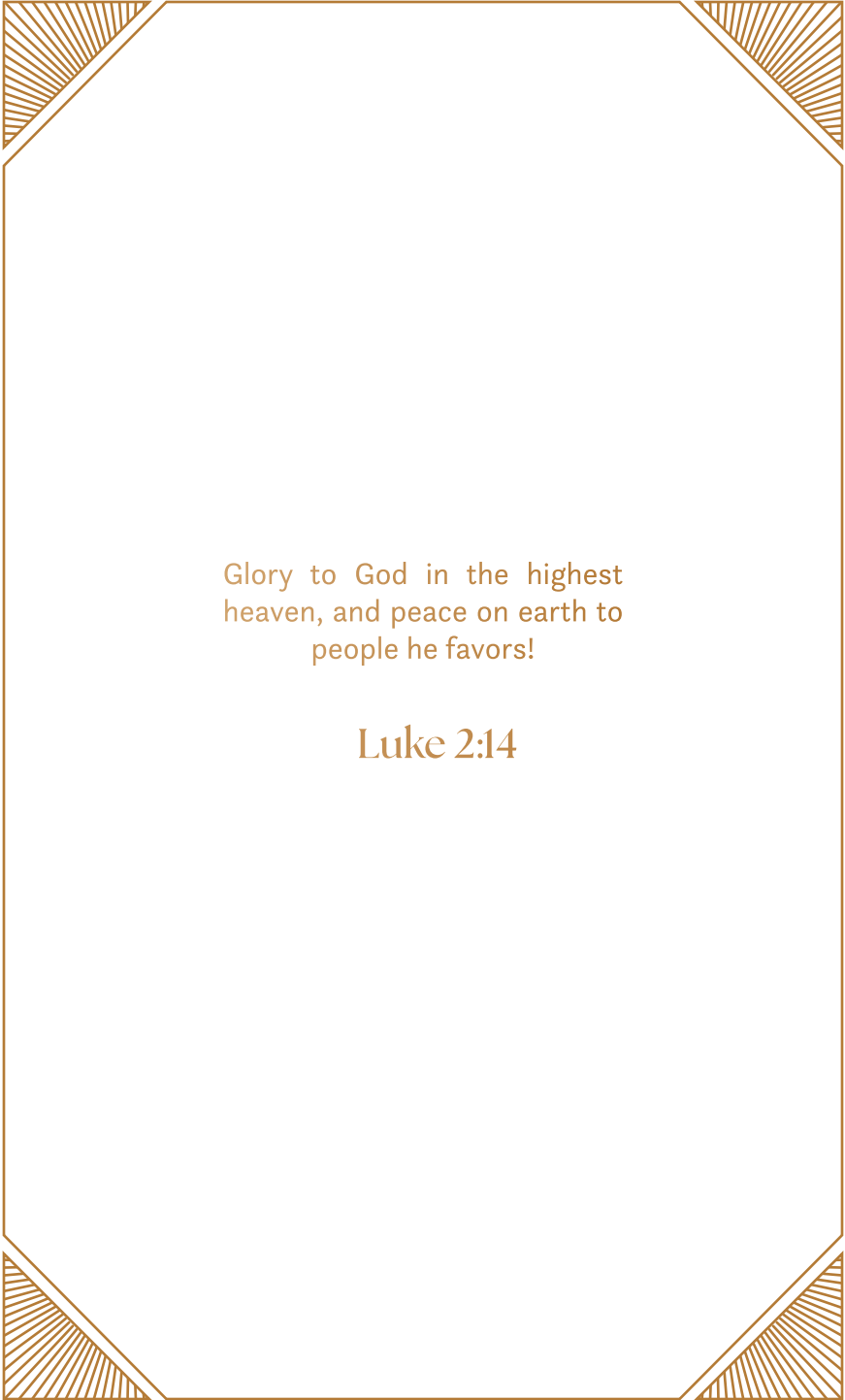
This peace is **eternal**. Unlike fragile truces or temporary agreements, it cannot be revoked, reversed, or undone. Once given by God through Christ, it is secure forever.

This peace is **personal**. It is not distant or theoretical. It reaches into the deep unrest of a weary heart, calming what the world cannot touch. It steadies us when life shakes, and it holds when everything else gives way.

Peace is not the result of perfect circumstances. It isn't found in politics, possessions, or control. Peace is found in a person, Jesus Christ. He does not simply give peace; He is peace. When He reigns in the heart, no storm can remove what He has secured.

Lord, thank You for sending Jesus, the Prince of Peace. In a world full of division and fear, help us rest in Your peace. Calm our hearts. Heal what is broken. And let Your peace flow through us to those around us. Amen.

Written by Aaron Summers



Glory to God in the highest
heaven, and peace on earth to
people he favors!

Luke 2:14

Dec 09

Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11, Ezekiel 13:10 & 16, Isaiah 7:14-15, 9:6-7, 50:6, 53:5,7,10,
Matthew 1-2, Luke 2

“Peace on earth, good will to men.” This message was proclaimed by the heavenly host to shepherds on that first Christmas Eve. I vividly imagine those hills and the shepherds tending to their flocks. But what kind of peace did those angels sing?

During a tour of Israel, I found myself trying to reconcile the angels’ song with the scars of war I witnessed while crossing into the West Bank. The words of prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, “peace, peace, when there is no peace,” rolled repeatedly in my mind.

The prophets’ words suggest that in the hands of humanity, there is never a lasting peace- neither among people nor in our souls. We need someone who can bring eternally lasting peace. Another prophet, Isaiah, foretold someone who can bring this perfect peace. This peace comes from the perfect sacrifice of a Messiah.

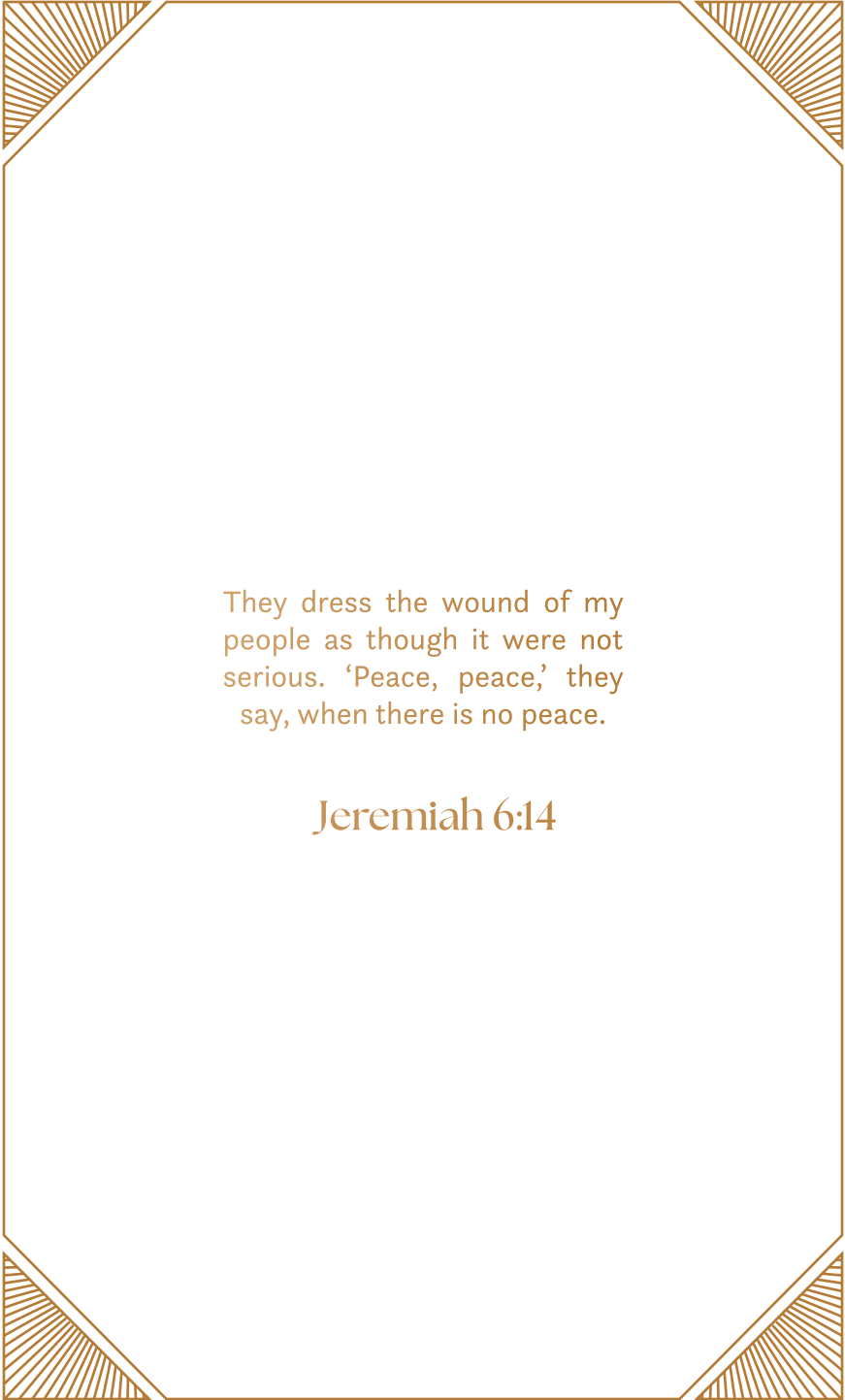
This is necessary because of humanity’s self-love, desire for power over others, tendency to destroy peace, sin and rebellion against God’s love for us. To achieve this peace, the Messiah had to suffer and die—to be rejected, beaten, crushed and hung on a tree. This suffering was essential to restore our relationship of peace with God.

This Messiah, therefore, could not be born of man. Isaiah called him Immanuel, meaning “God with us.” He will have other titles that represent his supremacy over anyone on earth; Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. “Prince of Peace!” This Messiah is the one the Angel sang of to those shepherds. We come to learn that the Prince of Peace is Jesus. Though a King, he was born in an animal feeding box, humble and poor, as Isaiah foretold. Born running from a massacre of Bethlehem’s infants, orchestrated by a king who feared his overthrow by the birth of this baby boy Jesus.

As I contemplated the dusty hills of Bethlehem, it struck me that the angel proclaimed the good news of the savior’s birth, the Prince of Peace, to the lowest members of that society-shepherds. Furthermore, Jesus’ humble birth means that no one is beyond the reach of the Messiah’s profound love and atoning sacrifice for our rebellion against God’s perfect peace. When the shepherds heard this good news, they left their sheep, worshiped Jesus and did not keep it a secret; they eagerly told everyone that would listen about the birth of the Prince of Peace.

The peace humanity seeks, whether it is in our hearts or between one another, can only be fulfilled by submitting our hearts to Jesus Christ the Messiah.

Written by Mark Heavener



They dress the wound of my
people as though it were not
serious. 'Peace, peace,' they
say, when there is no peace.

Jeremiah 6:14

Dec 10

Isaiah 9:6, John 14:27, 16:33

All of us long to have peace in our lives. Many of us have experienced glimpses of peace from time to time. A few of us might even say we live peacefully. But none of us want to live a life absent from peace. Webster Dictionary defines peace as a state of tranquility or quietness, tranquility of heart.

A life that is absent from peace is a terrible way to live. It is a life that knows nothing but chaos, misery, and extreme darkness. It is living with constant trouble in one's heart. By contrast, Jesus, who is called the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6) offers us perfect peace. In the gospel of John, chapter 14 verse 27, Jesus says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." The peace the world offers is a pseudo peace; it is false in every sense of the word; it is a lie. The world offers peace in titles, positions, material possessions and status. These so called "Peace Prizes" will all fade away eventually and we are left with dark emptiness in our life. Ever been there? It's not a great place to be, is it?

Worldly Peace:

- Is a temporal type of peace
- Leads to despair
- Is based only on feelings and emotions
- Will never satisfy you
- It is no peace at all

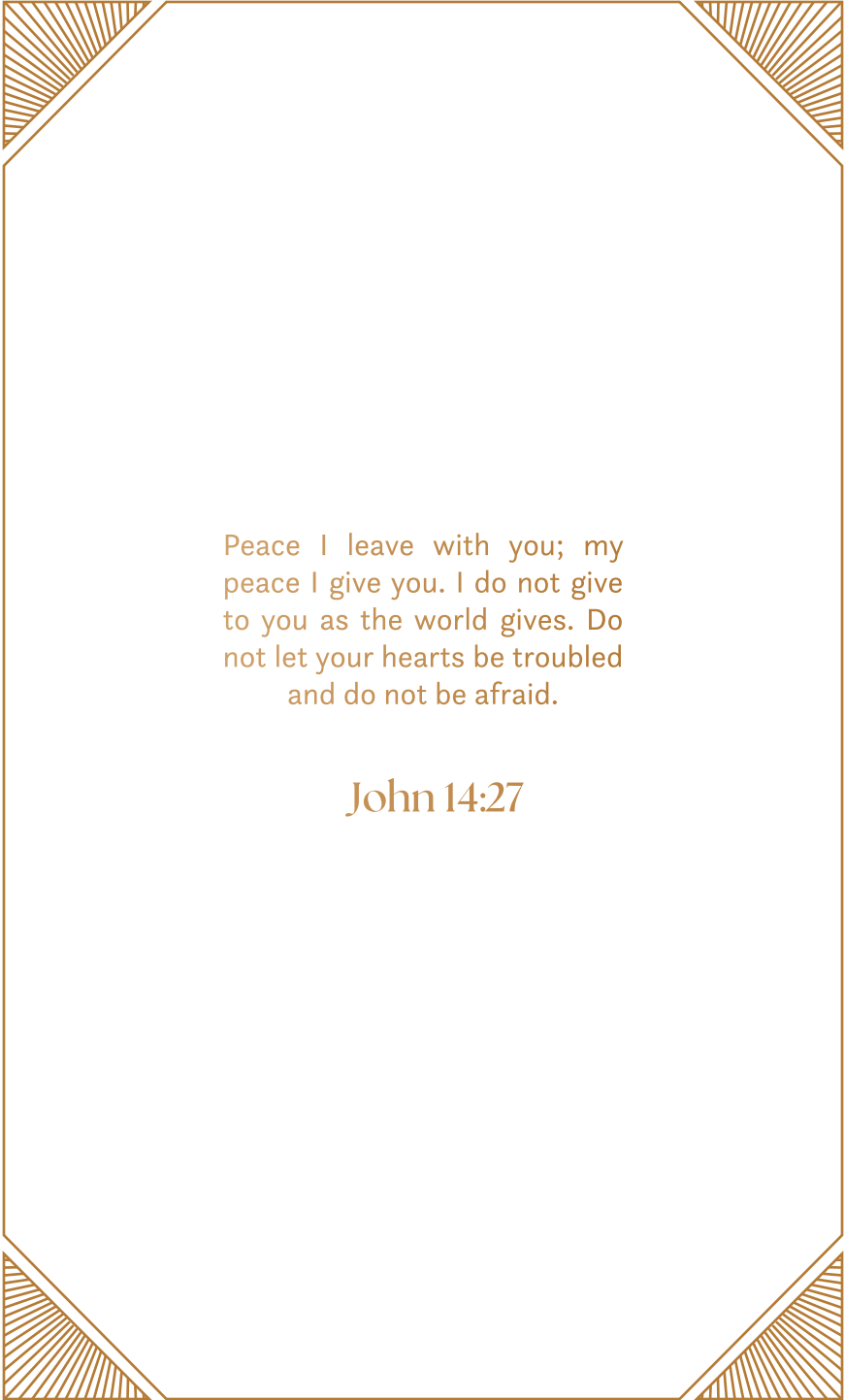
The only lasting peace is the one Jesus offers in His word. Not as the world gives, but true and everlasting peace. True tranquility of heart is present only in the heart of a person who totally surrenders themselves to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The person, who by grace through faith, receives God's gift of salvation is the one who finds true and lasting peace. This does not mean that Christians are exempt from facing difficult times and experiencing trouble. After all it is Jesus who says in the last verse of the gospel of John chapter 16, that in this world we would face trouble but not to be afraid because He too faced trouble yet overcame the world. Jesus reminds us, true peace is only found in him; "The Prince of Peace".

Jesus' Peace:

- Is real
- Brings rest to our souls
- Is not performance-based
- Is grounded in love
- Is everlasting

When I was about 12 years old, I was helping my father pick up bales of hay on the family farm. This was a backbreaking task, not to mention the scorching heat from the South Texas sun. As I was picking up a bale I heard a rattlesnake underneath. I immediately froze and turned to look at my father to get his attention. It felt like an eternity, but it was probably only a few seconds before my father noticed the dire situation. He instinctively grabbed a shovel from behind the truck and quickly ran to my rescue by striking the rattlesnake on its head. Whew, at once my anxious experience turned into one of peace. Why, because I looked to my father and he came to my rescue. Let me encourage you, in your anxious moments, look to your Heavenly Father for peace. During your darkest moments, trust in He who overcame this world to give you peace. Only in Jesus can we truly find peace.

Written by Noe Treviño



Peace I leave with you; my
peace I give you. I do not give
to you as the world gives. Do
not let your hearts be troubled
and do not be afraid.

John 14:27

Dec 11

John 16:33

Among the many words we associate with Advent season, Peace is at the top of the list. The angels themselves declared, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men,” at the birth of the Messiah. But in the season devoted to celebrating the birth of Jesus, peace can seem so far away. The world itself is anything but peaceful, much less our own personal lives, filled with the pressures and struggles that come with our regular activities. Work, school, family, health, grief; these things don’t stop because the calendar turns to December, and we put out our decorations.

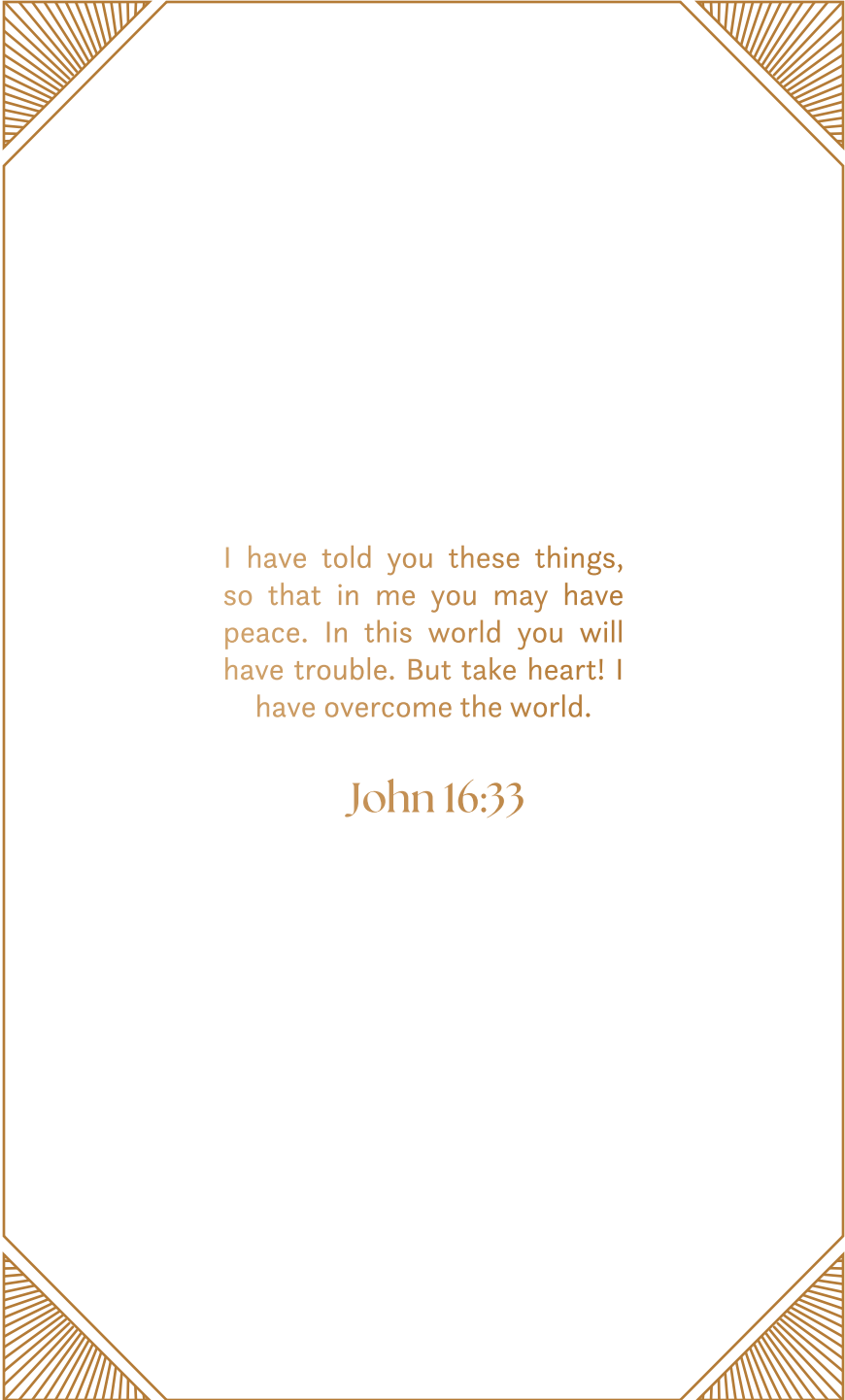
So how do you find the peace that we sing about in Christmas carols? The biblical peace that God wants for us isn’t found in the state of political affairs or by attempting to block out the things that cause us stress. If you are looking to a human being or earthly solution to provide you with peace, you will not find it. True peace is found only at the throne of God. It has nothing to do with world powers or how we handle life’s struggles. It is a peace only God can give.

In John chapter 16, Jesus is preparing his disciples for the time when he will no longer be with them physically on Earth. John 16:33 says, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

God’s peace is the knowledge that no earthly trial can defeat the kingdom he has prepared for us in eternity. It is the comfort that whatever we face in this temporary life, not only has he overcome it and declared victory on our behalf, but he will walk alongside us as we bear it on earth. And it is the promise of the true and everlasting peace of salvation through his grace.

Each of our lives have been uniquely designed and timed by God himself. He didn’t place us in this world during this time by chance. The personal battles we are fighting are not a punishment or an experiment to see how we will react. You are in this time and this place for a reason. The world you are living in may be broken, but He is not. Will you accept the peace that only God can provide and reflect it back into a world filled with doubt and chaos so that others may know and seek that same peace? As you move through this Advent season, think on the lyrics of Silent Night, and remember the peace God has designed for you; “sleep in heavenly peace.” Not earthly peace. Not personal peace. Heavenly, eternal, God-given peace.

Written by Carol Plant



I have told you these things,
so that in me you may have
peace. In this world you will
have trouble. But take heart! I
have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Dec 12

John 16:33

Have you ever wanted to cry out, “Get me out of here!” when life became painful or overwhelming? We’ve all faced moments when escape felt like the best answer. Yet in John 17, Jesus’ prayer for His disciples doesn’t include an escape plan. He doesn’t ask, “Father, take them out of the world.” Instead, He prays that they would be protected and filled with His joy and peace within it.

Jesus knew His followers would face difficulty, disappointment, and fear—just as we do. But His promise still stands: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

Peace, then, is not the absence of trouble but the presence of Christ. It’s not found in running away but in resting in the One who reigns above it all. God’s protection covers us in ways we often overlook:

His truth shields us from deception.

His strength sustains us in weakness.

His peace steadies us in anxiety.

His grace restores us when we fall.

His presence comforts us in loneliness.

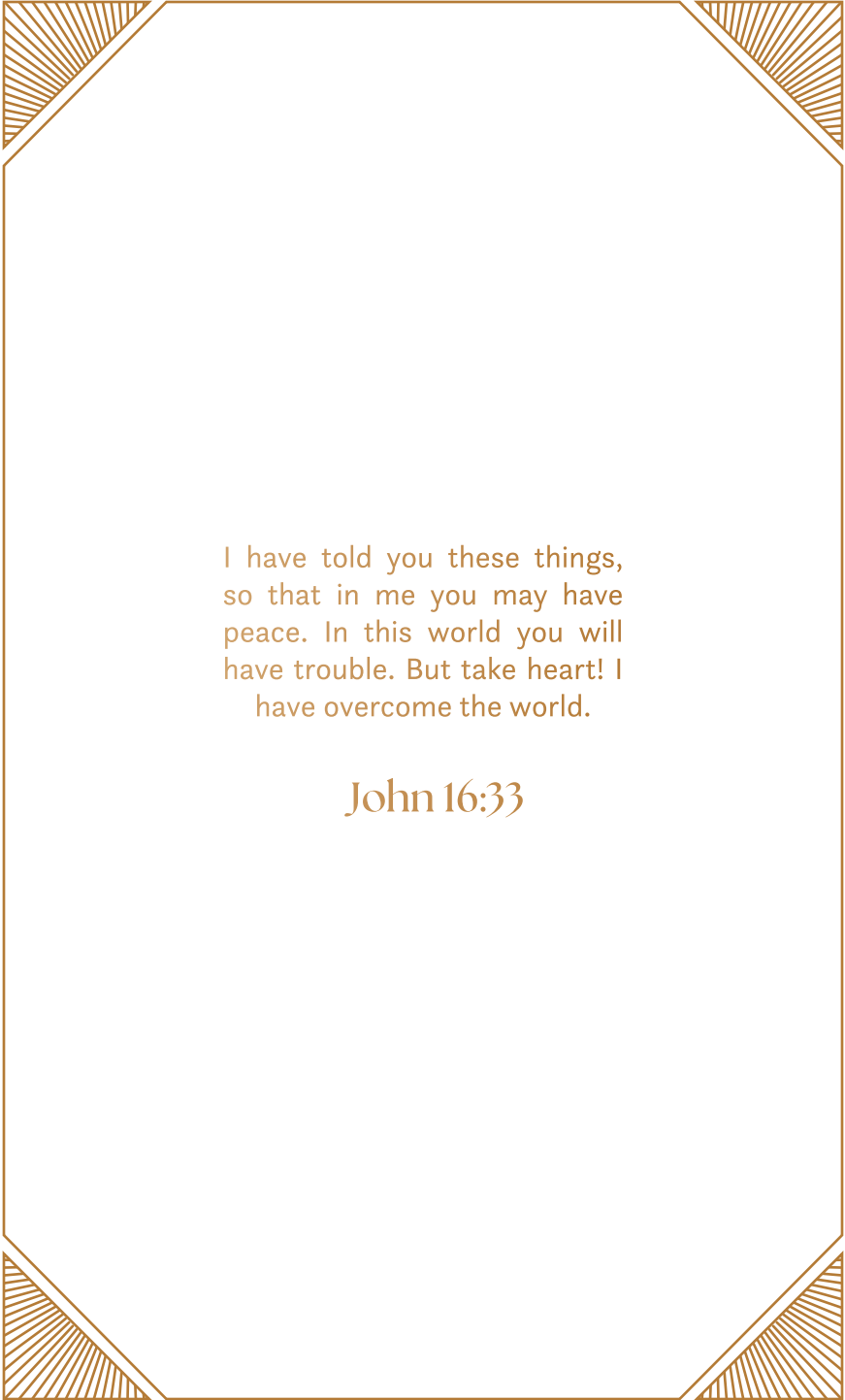
Even sin and death bow to His victory.

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” (1 Corinthians 15:55, NIV).

When you long to escape, remember that Jesus doesn’t remove us from the storm—He joins us in it. His peace is not fragile; it’s unshakable because it rests on His triumph.

Prayer: Lord, when I face trouble, help me find peace not in escape, but in Your presence and victory.

Written by Sergio Ramos



I have told you these things,
so that in me you may have
peace. In this world you will
have trouble. But take heart! I
have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Dec 13

Luke 2:14

When I was a kid, I thought 3D movies were so cool. Going to see one always felt like a big deal. Why? Because with regular movies, the images stayed on the screen and seemed far away, especially when sitting on one of the back rows. But with 3D, the images came out of the screen and were right in front of me, no matter where I sat. It just felt so much more real. I remember reaching out my hand to try and touch the objects floating in front of me.

At Christmas, we celebrate when our loving God sent his only Son to be with us. He walked with us, talked with us, ate with us, and slept with us. For many people, at that time God seemed so far away. They felt abandoned and forgotten. Then Jesus came out of heaven and lived among them. God was so close, you could touch him. And it was a big deal.

It was such a big deal that a multitude of angels showed up to shout about it. What did they say in Luke 2:14?

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among people with whom he is pleased.”

Jesus came to bring us peace. And the peace he offers us is three dimensional, impacting us in three different ways.

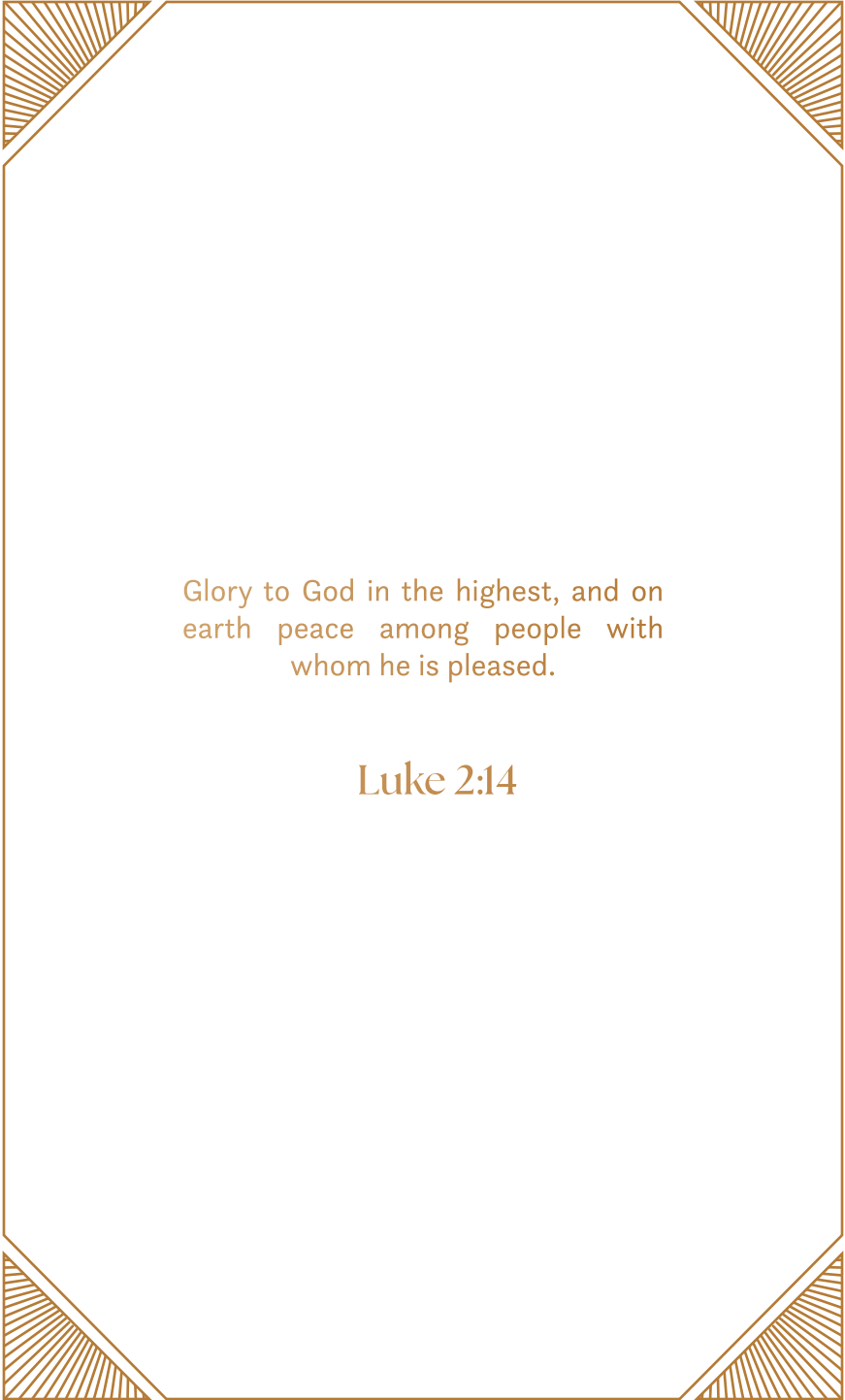
First, the upward dimension. Jesus brings us peace with God. While he was here on earth, Jesus lived a perfect life. He loved God fully and loved everyone around him well. He lived the type of life that God wants us to live. Because he did, he was able to die for our sins, so we can be forgiven for the many times we failed to live and love like Jesus. We can now have a relationship with God. That’s why Jesus said, “[I] came to seek and to save the lost.” That’s us!

Second, the inward dimension. Jesus brings us peace within our own restless hearts. Having a relationship with God through Jesus gives us comfort and peace in the middle of all of life’s ups and downs. If he loved us enough to send his Son to die for us, then we can trust he will take care of us. That’s why Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Third, the outward dimension. Jesus helps us seek peace with others. On earth, Jesus loved his friends and his enemies. He forgave his disciples after they abandoned him, and he forgave the Roman soldiers who nailed him to the cross. He gave us an example to follow in his footsteps, and challenged us to forgive others as he forgives us. Jesus’ love breaks through our bitterness.

This Christmas, let’s give Jesus all the glory for giving us peace in 3D.

Written by David Sanchez



Glory to God in the highest, and on
earth peace among people with
whom he is pleased.

Luke 2:14



JO



JOY

A promised comfort
Isaiah 9:6

Dec 14

John 10:10

When Jesus declared in John 10:10 that He came to give us abundant life, He wasn't promising an existence free from pain or disappointment. He was offering something far more revolutionary and profound; a life rooted in His presence.

The abundant life that Christ ushers in is not merely a happy life. Happiness rises and falls with our circumstances like a boat tossed on turbulent waves. What Jesus offers runs deeper. As the psalmist declares, "In Your presence there is fullness of joy" (Psalm 16:11). Notice the location of this joy—it exists in His presence, not in our circumstances.

This is the Advent truth we celebrate: God with us. Emmanuel. The One who was pleased as man with men to dwell. When heaven touched earth in that Bethlehem stable, everything changed. Not because our circumstances suddenly became easier, but because pure joy became available to us in every situation.

Trials do not determine joy (James 1:2). Let that truth sink deep into your weary heart this Advent season. The diagnosis doesn't determine your joy. The broken relationship doesn't determine your joy. The financial strain, the unanswered prayer, the dream that died; none of these circumstances have the final word. Joy is not dependent on what happens to us. Joy is determined by the presence of Christ alone.

Christ's presence in our lives means that joy and sorrow are not mutually exclusive concepts. We are often tempted to believe that we must choose between acknowledging our pain and experiencing joy. But the gospel offers us something more honest, rich and real.

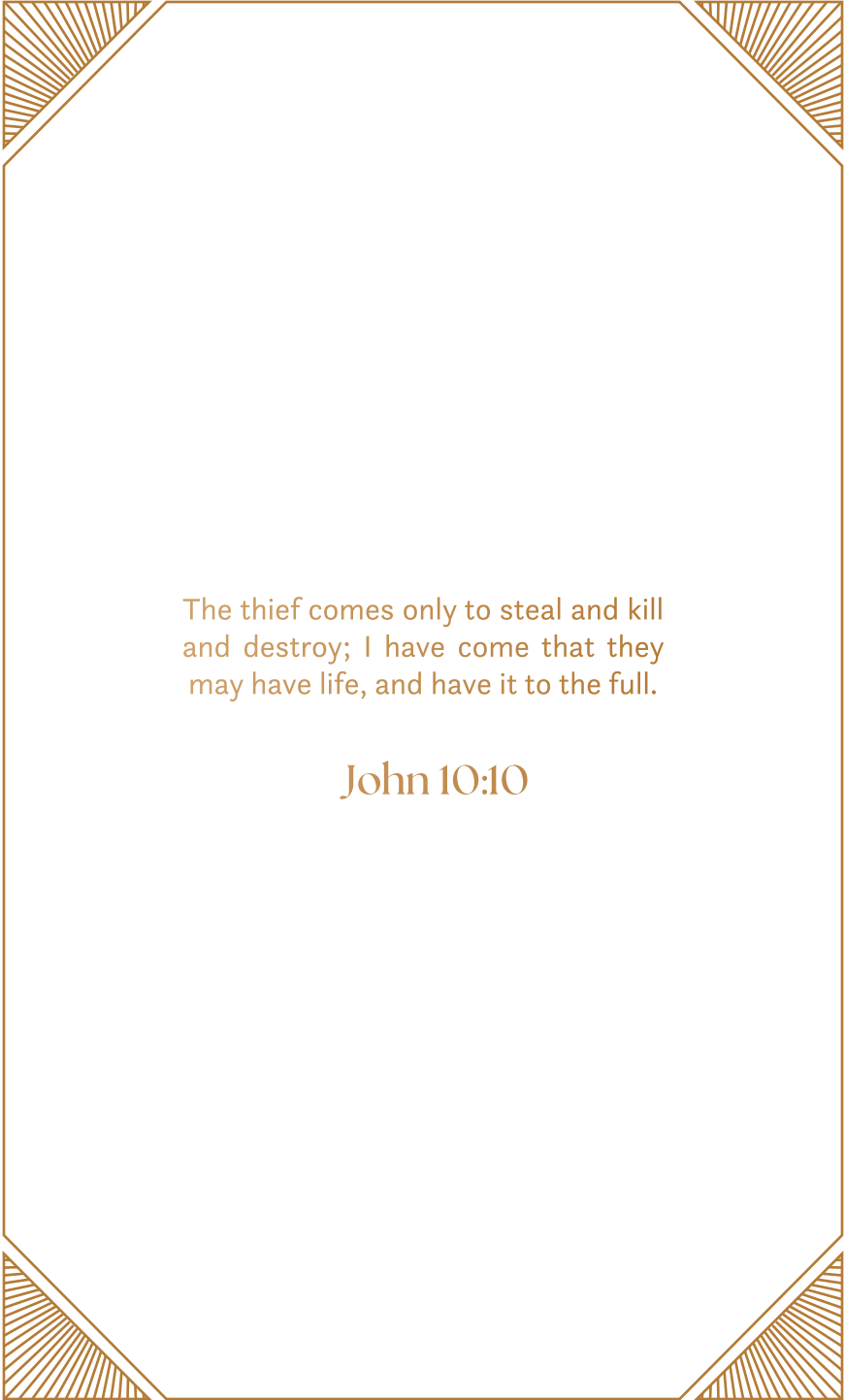
You can grieve and still have joy. You can acknowledge deep disappointment while simultaneously experiencing profound gratitude. You can weep over what is broken and worship the One who is making all things new. It is not contradictory; it's the full-bodied life of faith.

Joy and sorrow, woven together in the mystery of God's redemptive plan. Imagine the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth; common laborers living in occupied territory, watching flocks by night, when heaven suddenly broke through with news of great joy. Their circumstances hadn't changed. Life was still hard. But everything was different because the Messiah had entered the world.

This Advent, as we wait and watch and wonder, let us anchor ourselves to this truth: Christ is with us. In every moment of celebration and every season of sorrow, His presence remains constant. And in that presence we find the fullness of joy.

The abundant life Jesus promised isn't found in the absence of trials. It's found in His presence through every trial. That's the good news of great joy the angels proclaimed, and it remains true today.

Written by Katie Frugé



The thief comes only to steal and kill
and destroy; I have come that they
may have life, and have it to the full.

John 10:10

Dec 15

Zephaniah 3:14-20

This week we make a shift in our Advent journey. The first two weeks of Advent the focus was on hope and peace. Now, we pivot to JOY and focus on Rejoicing. The third Sunday of Advent is often referred to as Gaudete Sunday. Gaudete is a Latin word meaning, “rejoice!”. The candle that is rose or pink amongst the three other purple candles on the Advent Wreath signifies the pivot...a visual color cue that a shift toward celebration and rejoicing is underway. This is an opportunity for us to pause and reflect on the joy God provides, but also the promise of salvation and renewal that His presence brings a world desperate for Him.

If you have a Bible app, I invite you to turn to the New Century Version of today’s passage. The editors have titled this passage A Happy Song! Verse 14 says, “Be happy and rejoice with all your heart.” It adds in verses 16-17, “Don’t give up. The Lord your God is with you; the mighty One will save you. He will rejoice over you. You will rest in His love; He will sing and be joyful about you.”

Allow God to rejoice over you, rest in His love so that your life brings joy to others within our community. Being happy tends to be contagious! Others around you want to also experience the same kind of joy, laughter, and positivity that God shares with you. Show them the source of your joy.

In 2014 the best-selling song of the year was “Happy” written and recorded by Pharrell Williams. Ironically, although a toe-tapping, contagious song, “Happy” is written in the key of F-minor. Minor songs are typically dark and ominous sounding. But not this one! Maybe it resonated with so many because joy and happiness can be found in the midst of the minor key. Let God rejoice over you today whatever your circumstance.

God, thank You for rejoicing over me as I go through the storms of life. Help me to share that same joy with my community. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Written by Tom Tillman

Sing, Jerusalem.
Israel, shout for joy!
Jerusalem, be happy
and rejoice with all your heart.
The Lord has stopped punishing you;
he has sent your enemies away.
The King of Israel, the Lord, is with you;
you will never again be afraid of being harmed.
On that day Jerusalem will be told,
“Don’t be afraid, city of Jerusalem.
Don’t give up.
The Lord your God is with you;
the mighty One will save you.
He will rejoice over you.
You will rest in his love;
he will sing and be joyful about you.”

“I will take away the sadness planned for you,
which would have made you very ashamed.
At that time I will punish
all those who harmed you.
I will save my people who cannot walk
and gather my people who have been thrown out.
I will give them praise and honor
in every place where they were shamed.
At that time I will gather you;
at that time I will bring you back home.
I will give you honor and praise
from people everywhere
when I make things go well again for you,
as you will see with your own eyes,” says the Lord.

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Dec 16

John 15:11; Nehemiah 8:10, Romans 8:28

One of my favorite Christmas words has always been joy. In fact, I have an entire Christmas tree in my dining room dedicated to ornaments that say that very word. There's something about joy that captures the essence of Christmas for me and reflects my relationship with the Lord — it's encouraging, hopeful and deeply rooted in the story of Jesus.

But what is joy? Joy is a deep and abiding gladness that doesn't come from our circumstances but from our relationship with God. It is the confident assurance that He is good, that He is in control and that His presence is with us no matter what trials or uncertainties come our way.

We see the word joy throughout Scripture, but a couple of verses stand out to me. In John 15:11, Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." And Nehemiah 8:10 reminds us, "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Over time, I've learned that true joy doesn't depend on how I feel or what I achieve — it flows from the presence of God within me. It's easy to look for joy in other parts of life: relationships, careers, ministries or accomplishments. But when we anchor our joy in these things, it often leads to disappointment, anxiety, or loss of direction.

Joy that comes from the Lord, however, brings inner strength. It reminds us of who He is and that our joy can only be found in Him. As we reflect this month on the miracle of God sending His Son into the world as a tiny baby, we are reminded that our strength doesn't come from ourselves — it comes from Him.

When we rely on God's strength instead of our own, our perspective shifts. We begin to see that He is working in every circumstance — for our good and His glory. Romans 8:28 affirms this: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

Even when life feels uncertain, joy in the Lord gives us confidence that He is at work in our lives. We recognize that apart from Him, we can do nothing, but with Him, we have everything we need. So as you go through this season, take time to reflect on the joy that comes from knowing the Lord. Surrender your plans and your need for control. Depend on His strength, because true joy — lasting, unshakable joy — is found only in Him. Life is so much sweeter when we walk in step with Him!

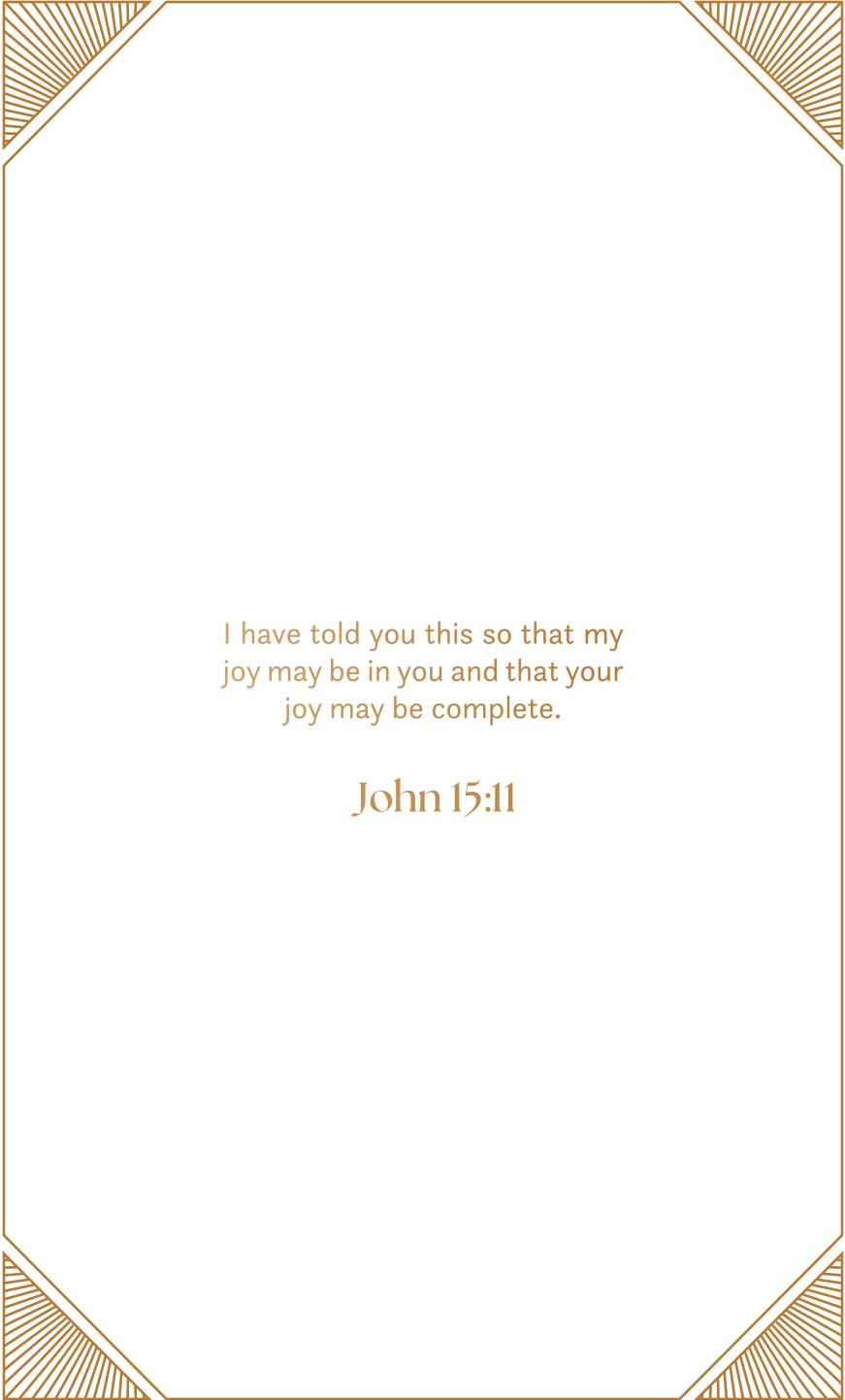
Journal Prompt:

Where have you been trying to find joy apart from God? How can you intentionally shift your focus this week to find your joy and strength in Him alone?

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for being the source of my joy and strength. Help me to find contentment not in the things of this world but in Your presence. Teach me to rest in Your joy and to trust that You are working all things together for my good and Your glory. Amen.

Written by Jessica Prince



I have told you this so that my
joy may be in you and that your
joy may be complete.

John 15:11

Dec 17

Luke 2:8-14

Many of us know the Christmas story. We've heard it as a child, we've seen Charlie Brown and Linus tell it to us, or we have seen our Churches Choirs tell it in song. But have we really understood it? When you read Luke 2:8-14 (KJV) and listen to the words, you can see what a truly joyous and miraculous event took place.

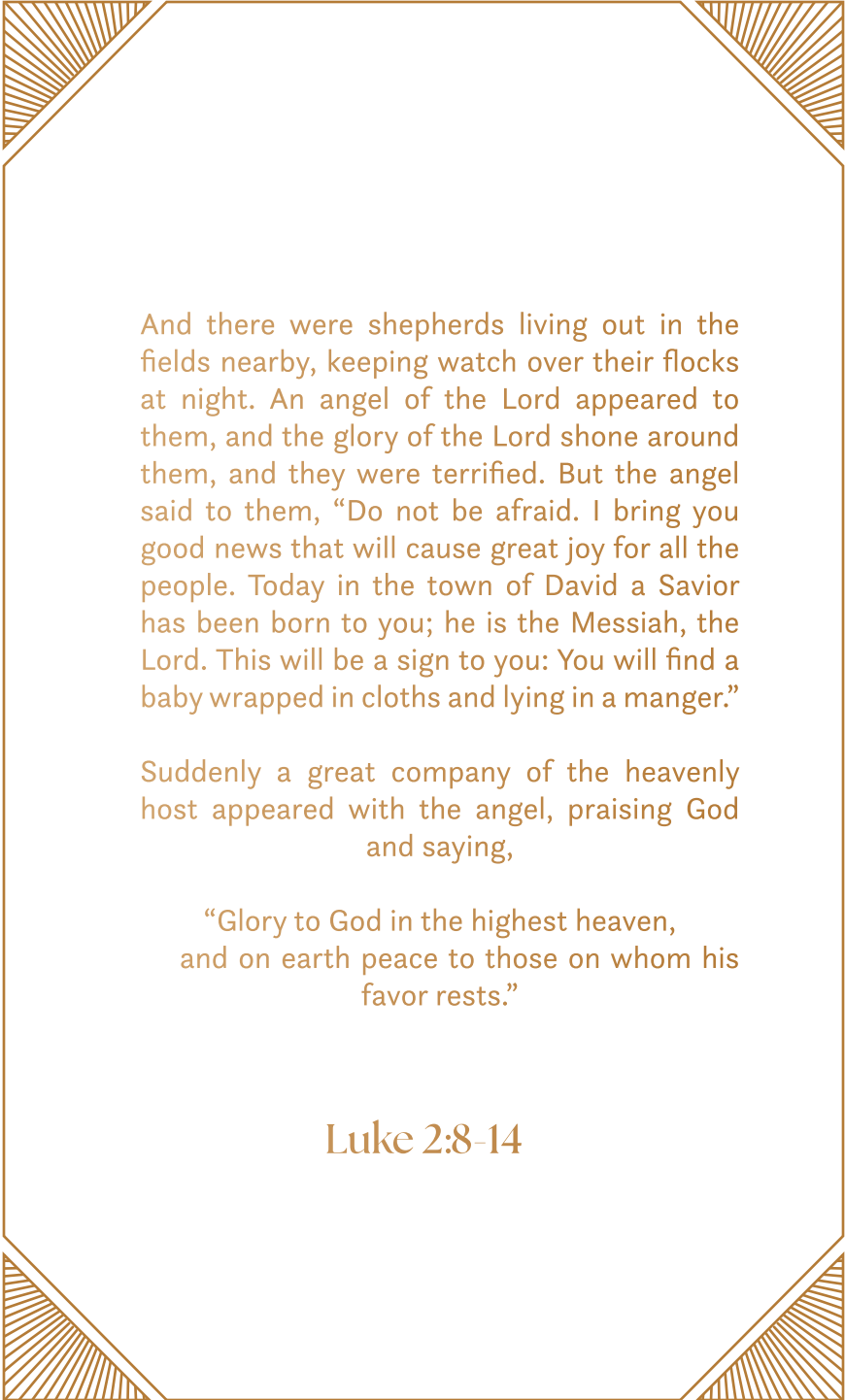
Imagine being one of a handful of people standing in an open field. All you can see is land from horizon to horizon. All there is, are sheep, and your two or three friends. It is so dark, that the only light comes from the moon and stars. Your routine is now instinct. Your movements, your tasks, your conversations, even your thoughts. All the same.

Then a light appears. The second most amazing thing tonight happens. Everything in your simple existence just stops. Here is a being of immense beauty and light. You are astounded! You are terrified! And then it speaks. "Fear not! For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy. Which shall be to all people!" Now of course, when an angel appears out of nowhere and says to pay attention, you listen! "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior. Which is Christ the Lord!" Did that angel say what you thought they just said? A Savior. You have listened to the teachings from your father all your life. A Messiah will come one day. And that Angel just said the Savior will be born just over in Bethlehem. Then the MOST glorious thing that night happens. "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the Heavenly Host praising God and saying GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST AND ON EARTH PEACE GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN!"

Now we have all been to church on Sunday, or Easter or Christmas. It was a little crowded then. Some of us have been lucky enough to go to a Professional Championship Game. That's usually "Holiday" church times ten. But what you have just seen was a choir stretching from horizon to horizon. And these angels were singing with such perfect pitch, your heart wept with total joy. Now you know you are not hallucinating. You are already half a mile away from your flock of sheep before you realize that you are running towards Bethlehem.

Then you see the manger. The Christ child is there. Your heart is ready to burst. Your whole night has been a blessing. God had called you to witness the most amazing event in history. You, a simple sheep herder, doing a simple job, was asked to do a simple task, to see the simple arrival of a simple baby. A simple event that will change the world. How many times are we asked to do a simple task by God? When you are asked, just remember that simple sheep herder.

Written by Travis McClinton



And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his
favor rests.”

Luke 2:8-14

Dec 18

Nehemiah 8:10

Israel had just heard God's Word after years of exile and neglect. As they listened, they began to weep as they thought about how far they had drifted from God. But Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites encouraged them not to remain in sorrow. Instead, they reminded the people that this was a day of restoration, not ruin.

“Do not grieve,” Nehemiah said, “for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

This wasn't a call to ignore their sin or their suffering, it was an invitation to look beyond it. Their strength wasn't found in their perfection, but in God's presence and power. True joy isn't dependent on circumstances; it flows from knowing who God is — faithful and forgiving. When life feels heavy, we often try to find strength in people, places, and things. But the deepest strength comes from joy — the settled confidence that God is good, that He is with us and that His promises still stand.

In the words of the psalmist, weeping may endure for a night but, JOY comes in the morning. Psalm 30:5

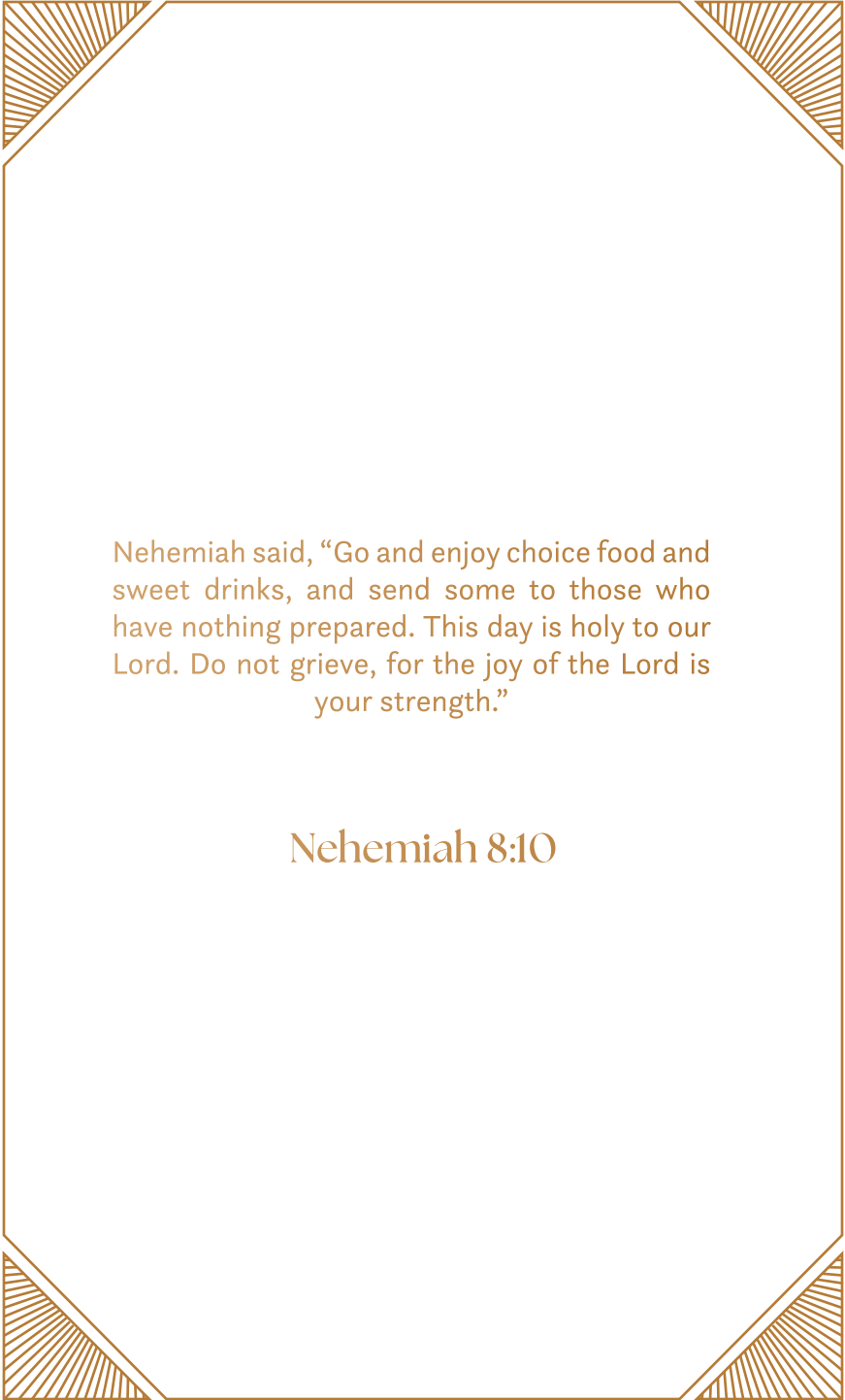
Take a moment today to thank God for His faithfulness, even in difficult seasons.

Choose joy, not because everything is perfect, but because He is present.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that Your joy is my strength. When I am weary, remind me that Your presence brings peace and power. Help me to walk in joy that shines even in the darkest days, and to share that joy with others. Amen.

Written by Oza Jones



Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

Nehemiah 8:10

Dec 19

Luke 2:10-11

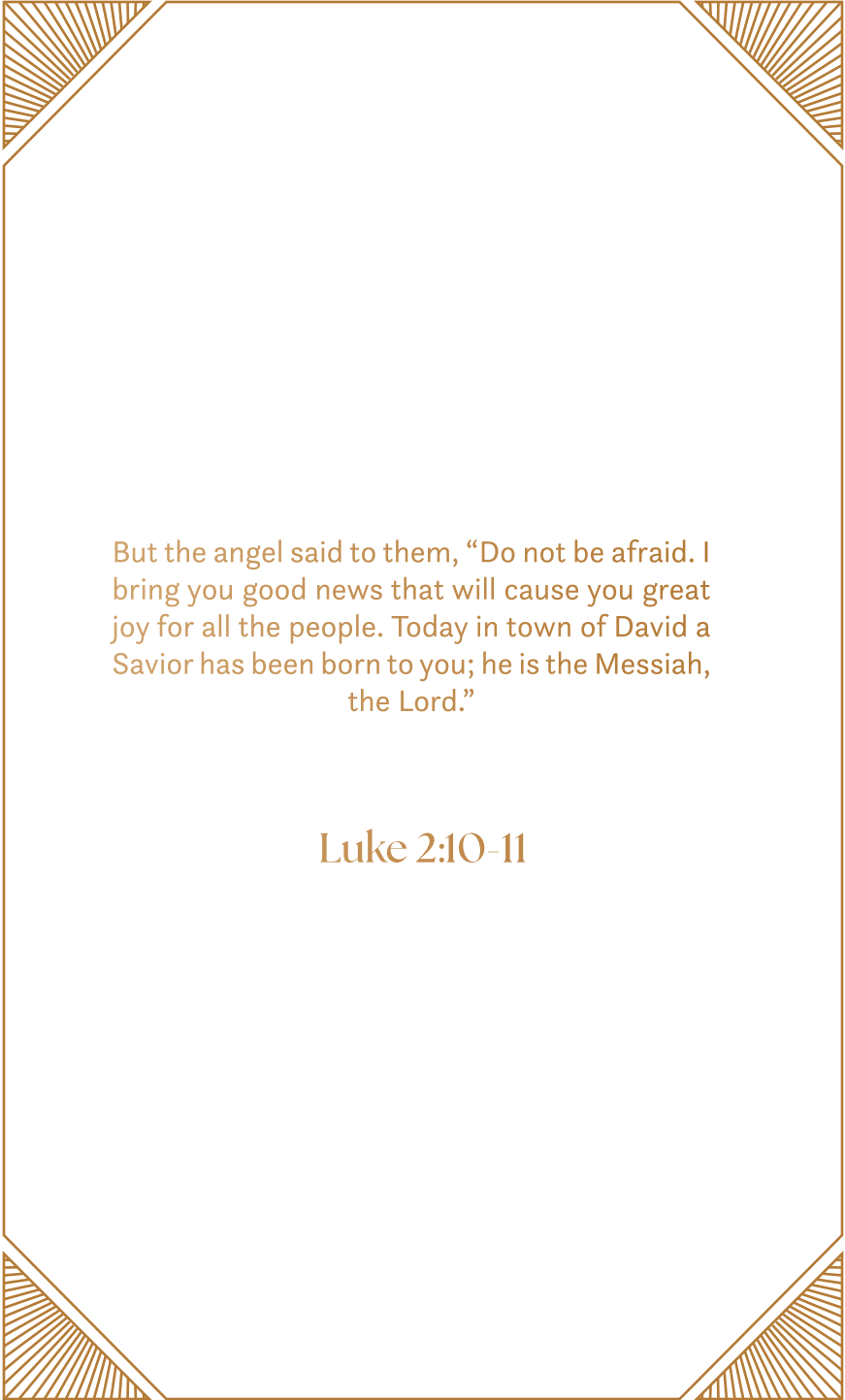
The night that Jesus was born, there was a group of shepherds watching their sheep in a field, minding their own business, when suddenly an angel appeared right in front of them. The Bible tells us exactly what went through the shepherds' minds when the angel appeared: absolute terror. But the angel quickly replaced their fear with a message of absolute joy: "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (Luke 2:10-11, CSB).

After the angel told the shepherds how to find the baby and all the angels that had joined the first in the most spectacular birth announcement the world had ever seen returned to heaven, the shepherds took immediate action and went straight to Bethlehem to find their long-awaited Savior. They found him, just like the angel had said, wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.

Then something else happened. The good news of great joy that the angel told them became contagious. The shepherds spread the news about the newborn Savior to anyone who would listen, before returning to their sheep, praising God for what they had seen and heard.

Ever since that day, the good news of Jesus has brought joy to those who hear it and take it into their heart—a contagious joy that they just can't keep to themselves. It's the joy that led Andrew, as soon as he met Jesus, to go find his brother and bring him along. It's the joy of a man with leprosy, who even though Jesus told him not to tell anyone about his healing, went out and told the whole world anyway. It's the joy of a woman who went out in the heat of the day to get water and returned to her village to tell everyone that she had found the Messiah. It's the joy that caused a tax collector in Jericho to welcome Jesus into his home, give away half of his possessions and pay back four times what he had stolen. It's the joy of a group of women who rushed to tell the disciples that Jesus is alive. It's the joy on the face of a new believer coming up out of the water who can't wait to tell everyone the good news. And it's the contagious joy that lives in us as we, like the shepherds, proclaim the good news of great joy that a Savior has been born for us, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

Written by Sarah Johnson



But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause you great joy for all the people. Today in town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.”

Luke 2:10-11



LO



VE

A promised comfort
Isaiah 9:6

Dec 20

Colossians 1:27

As a child, Christmas was my favorite holiday. I loved being with family, the fun of special activities at school and church, and enjoying the break from school—but mostly, I loved the gifts!

There were certain things I could count on each year—the annual refresh of socks and underwear, the “nice” shirts and new jeans, and my dad’s giant peppermint stick in our stockings. But what really thrilled me was racing to the living room to see the gifts I had hoped for but hadn’t been sure I’d get. The excitement and joy were unmatched—especially the year I got my first horse!

As an adult, Christmas looks different. Let’s be honest—who doesn’t love opening a gift? But now I look forward even more to time with family, the moments around the table and watching my kids’ excitement. Their joy is even better than what I felt as a child. There’s something about giving and receiving love through gifts that reflects the very heart of God.

As we walk toward our celebration of the birth of our King, what is it that you love about the Advent season?

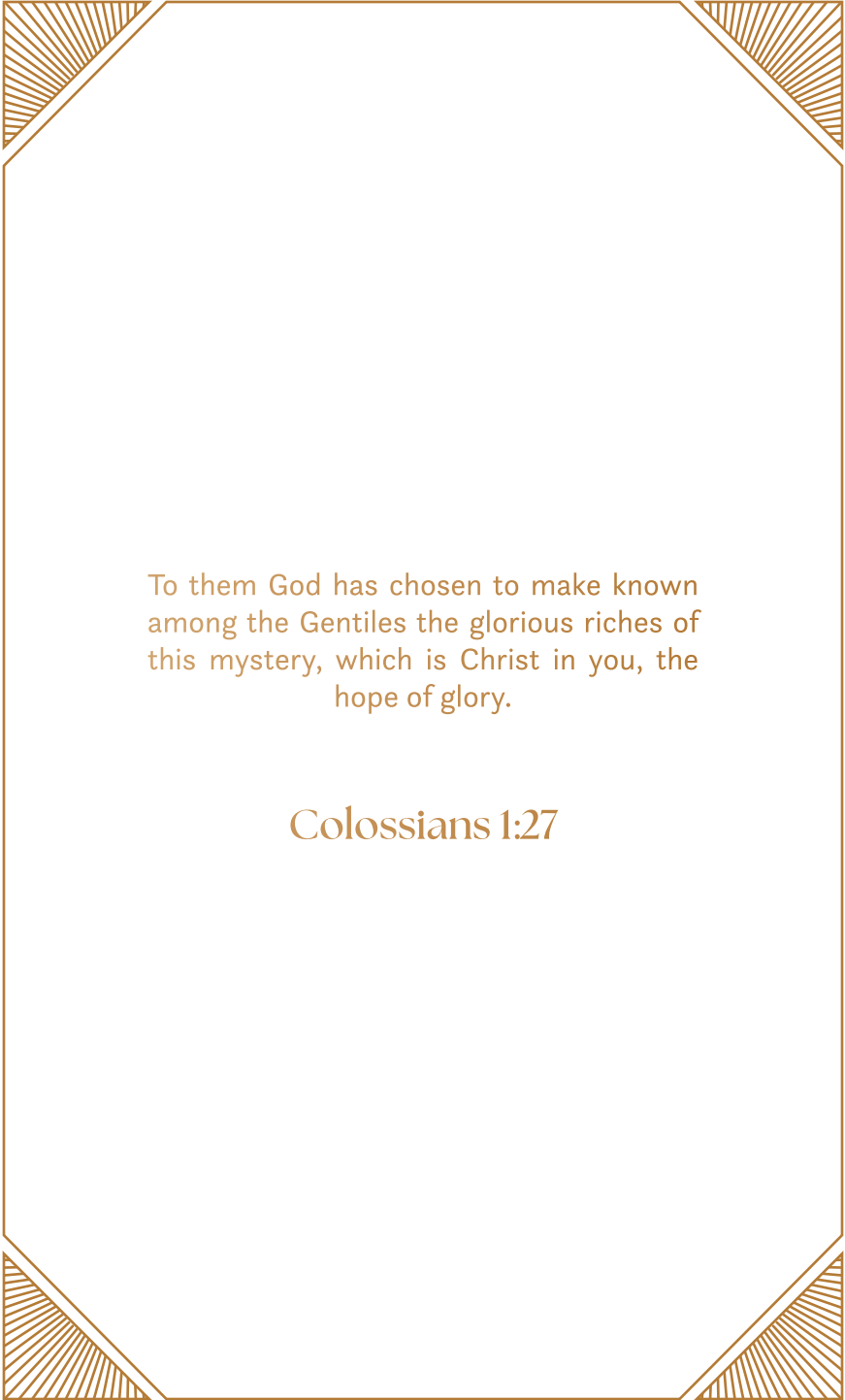
In Colossians 1:27, Paul writes, “To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” At the center of that mystery is love—God’s love made visible through Christ.

In the busyness of the season, it’s easy to lose sight of what we celebrate and what we hope for. I love how that passage ends: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” That’s love embodied—God choosing to dwell within us, to make His love personal. Our journey with Christ may feel familiar at times; there are things we trust God will continue to do because of his faithfulness and because of what He has already done. In our everyday lives, we see God’s love through His provision, His protection, His care. We celebrate a faithful God who pursued us, restored our relationship with Him and gave us His Son—our rescuer—to make it all possible. That is the greatest expression of love. And yet, there’s more love ahead. We have a faithful Father who has already given good gifts but is preparing something even greater. Imagine the moment when our faith becomes sight—when we fully experience the love of a holy God as we stand in His presence!

My wife and I find such joy in giving gifts to our children because we love them. How much more does our Heavenly Father delight in showering us with His perfect love through His good gifts?

Take some time today to thank God for His love in your everyday life. How has He shown His love to you lately? Then pause for a moment, close your eyes, and imagine what it will be like to experience the fullness of His love in the presence of our glorious God. Before you move on with your day, express your gratitude to Him for His deep, unending love.

Written by Kurt Krodle



To them God has chosen to make known
among the Gentiles the glorious riches of
this mystery, which is Christ in you, the
hope of glory.

Colossians 1:27

Dec 21

Romans 5:6-8

There was a man who was caught in a snowstorm one winter night. His car had broken down miles from where he lived and his phone had died. As the temperatures continued to drop, he decided to take a chance by walking, hoping to find help. Hours passed, and his strength began to fade.

Just when he was about to give up, he saw headlights appear in front of him. It was a stranger who had stopped. He wrapped him in a blanket and took him to safety. Later, the man told the good samaritan, "I wouldn't have made it if help hadn't found me."

That's the message of Romans 5:6–8. When we were lost, powerless and unable to help ourselves, love found us. God didn't wait for us to get it right or to come looking for him. "At just the right time," Christ came for us, stepping into our storm, finding us in our brokenness and bringing us home.

That is what Advent is all about. The birth of Jesus is heaven's rescue mission in action. Love came down, not because we were ready, but because we were desperate. God's love is not a reward for the righteous; it's a rescue for the lost. Think about that kind of love.

You see, the world teaches us to love people who love us back and to help those who can repay the favor. But God's love flips the script. His love moves first, his love takes the initiative and his love sacrifices everything for those who have nothing to give in return.

During this Advent season, as you light the candle of love, remember that love came for you. The same love that left heaven for a manger, that walked dusty roads, that hung on a cross...that love still finds people in the cold and dark places of life today.

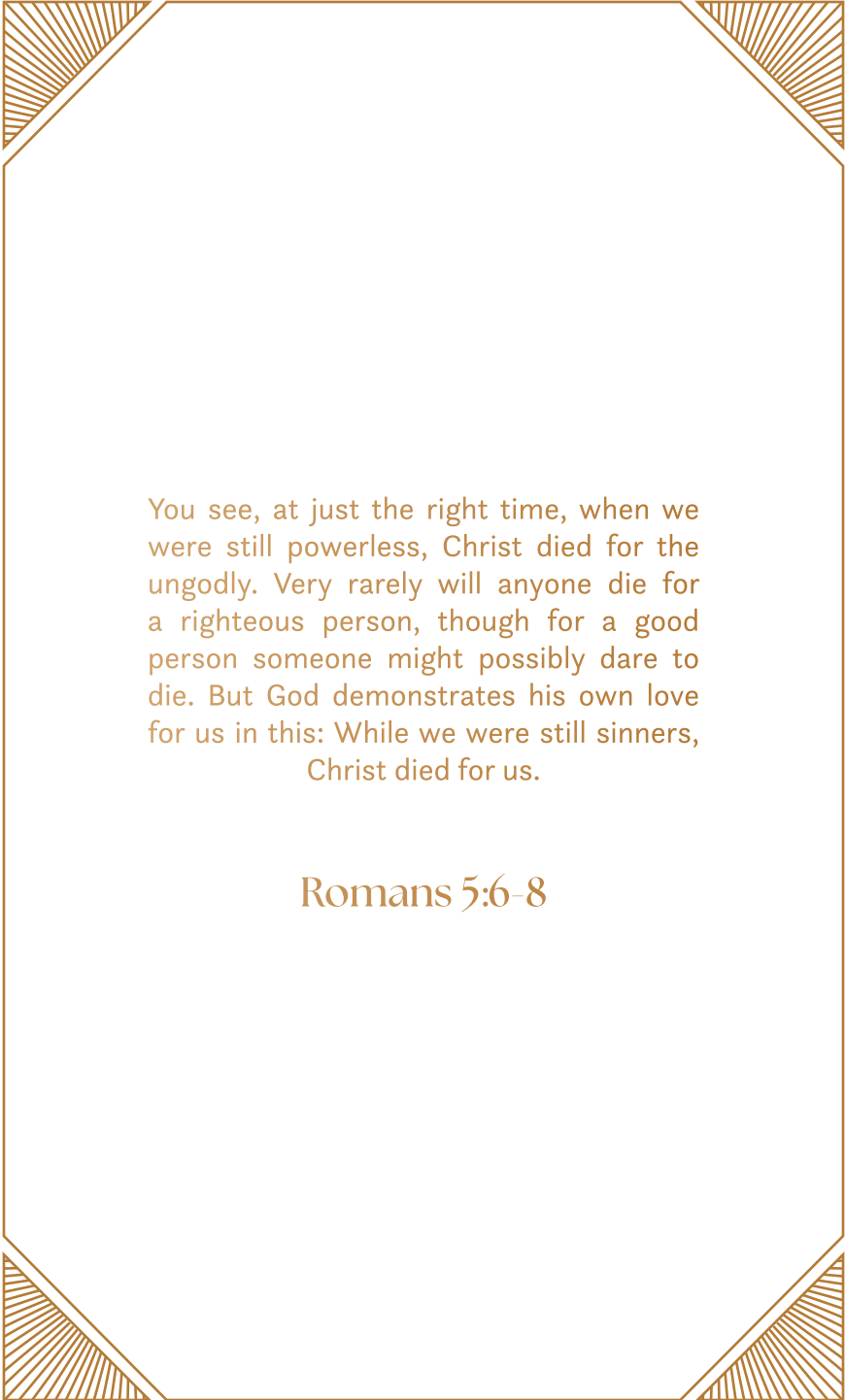
You don't have to search for God's love. It has already found you.

Prayer

Lord, Thank you for the love that found me when I couldn't find you. Allow that same love to shape my heart this Advent season. Help me reflect your compassion toward others who need to know that they too are found.

In Jesus's name, Amen.

Written by Marcus Wilson



You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:6-8

Dec 22

1 John 4:9-10

The 1960's was a very volatile time in the life of our nation. The Vietnam war was raging and the push for civil rights for African Americans was at the forefront of our society. In 1961, an African American pastor named Edward Victor (E.V.) Hill moved to Los Angeles to become pastor of the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist church in the Watts neighborhood which was at the center of much social and political activism.

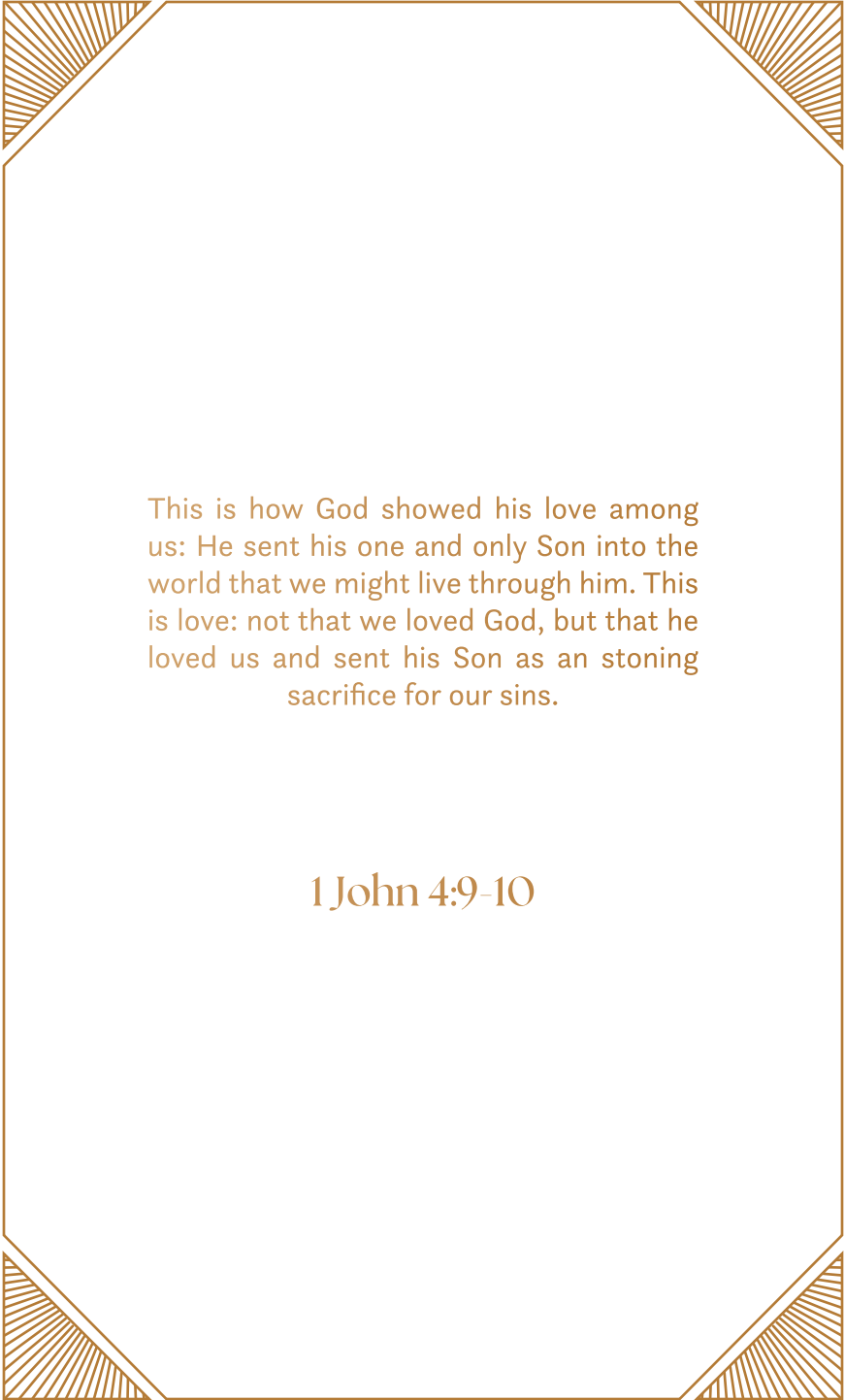
Soon after moving to the Mount Zion Church and Watts, Pastor Hill found himself in the middle of opposition from two foes: White Supremacists who hated him for his stand on rights for Blacks and Blacks who resented his message of love and reconciliation toward our fellow man regardless of color. Caught in the middle of these two warring ideologies Pastor Hill regularly received threats against his life. One time he received a call in the middle of the night telling him his car was going to be bombed the next morning. His wife Jane Edna asked him, "What was that call about?" He assured her it was nothing and told her to go back to sleep.

The next morning when he awakened early, he could not find his wife. After searching frantically throughout his modest house he noticed his car was missing from the driveway. When he was about to call the police and file a missing person's report his car pulled up in the driveway and Jane Edna was behind the steering wheel. Pastor Hill, visibly upset, asked his wife where she had been? She remarked, "I overheard that person on the phone in the middle of the night. If someone was going to die I would rather it be me than you." Pastor E.V. Hill said from that day forward he never once asked his wife, "Do you love me?" She had demonstrated her love for him by her willingness to sacrifice her life for his.

As we prepare for this Christmas season with the period of advent we never have to ask our Savior, "Jesus, do you love me?" He has expressed his love for each of us by his willingness to come to this earth in human form and eventually go to the cross for our sins. The Apostle John writes, "This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:9-10 (NIV)

May we have grateful and thankful hearts during this advent season for the love our Savior has demonstrated to us in his coming to this earth.

Written by Tim Watson



This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4:9-10

Dec 23

John 3:17

As I contemplate the gift of God's love through Christ, I am simply amazed. Too often, I hear the familiar story of Jesus' birth and let its true significance pass right over me. How much God must love us to send His Only Son for the sole purpose of the redemption of those living in this messed-up world.

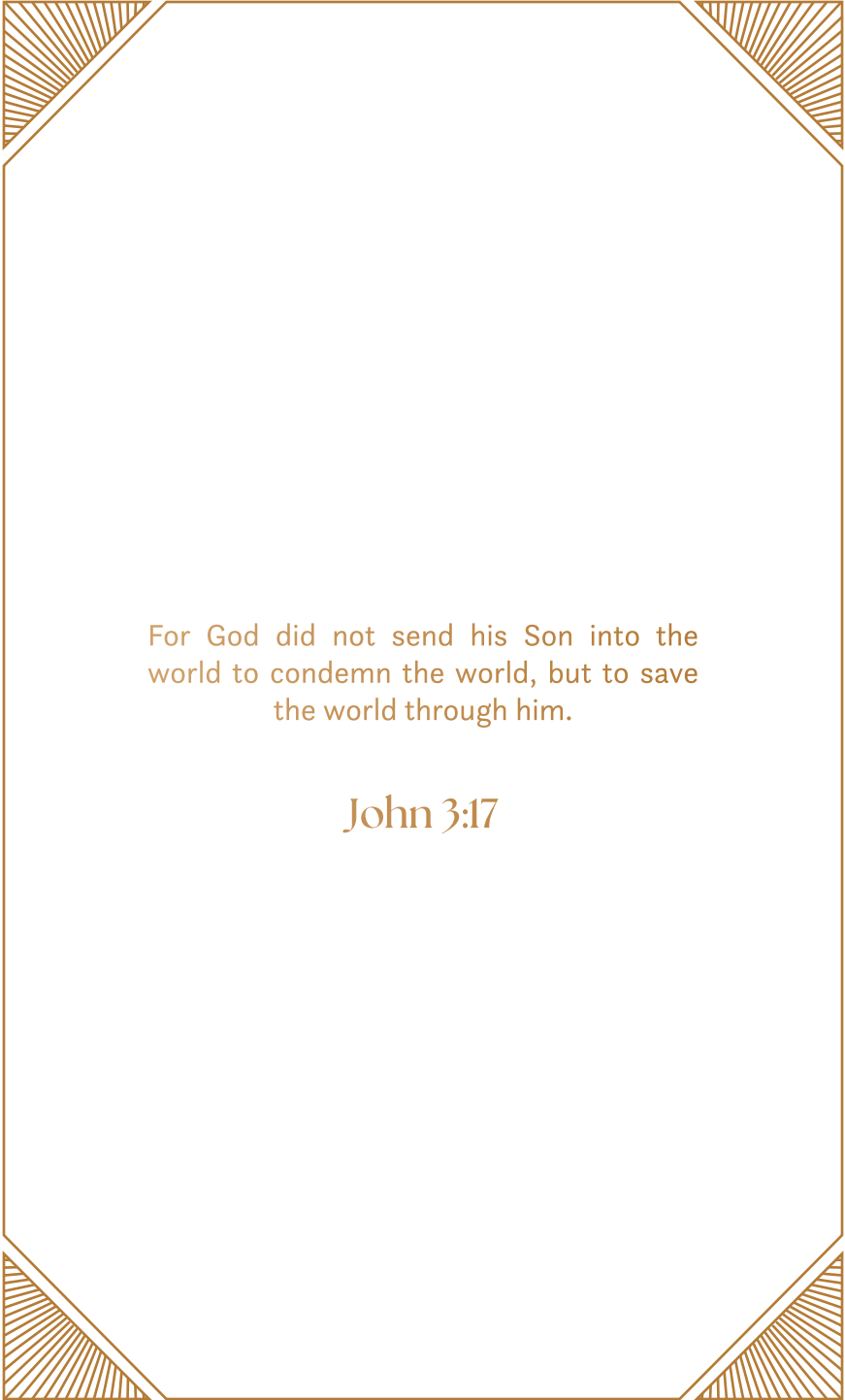
God's love is so unconventional that He did not send His Son as a King dressed in royal robes with jewels and riches at His disposal, though He could have. God's vision was one of love—for His son to live among those He had created. To know us. To understand our struggles as humans. To love us. To sacrifice Himself so that we might be brought back into relationship with Himself. He, who had all the rights of God and could justly judge us—condemn us—instead chose to give Himself as a sacrifice to save us.

How do I put into words the shock and awe that is Jesus being born of a young virgin—God in flesh—helpless and vulnerable? The joy of His birth—the rejoicing of the angels, the worship of shepherds and Kings. With His birth, the long-laid plans and love of God came to fulfillment. Not as a King reigning in Glory—though one day we will get to see Him do that—but as a baby born to a poor family, wrapped in swaddling and lying in a feeding trough.

God chose this amazing, unconventional way of bringing salvation to you and I. Why? Because of God's overwhelming and unexplainable love for us all. For you and for me.

Do I understand it—this means of selfless love? NO! And yet, how like our God who allowed Adam and Eve a choice in the garden, who provided Noah a way of escape from the evil around him, who Himself cut covenant with Abraham, who rescued Israel from Pharaoh, and who chose a shepherd boy to be King of Israel. God's plans throughout the history of mankind have been to provide a path for salvation. God loved each of us and planned all along for our redemption. How like Him to give Himself for us all. To come into the world, not to judge it, but to save all who call Him Lord. What a wonderful, amazing and undeserved gift is Jesus. May we all remember the depth of God's love that this Advent season represents.

Written by Linda Howell



For God did not send his Son into the
world to condemn the world, but to save
the world through him.

John 3:17

Dec 24

Romans 12:9-10

Growing up I was raised in a beautiful, loving home with two amazing parents. Spiritually, we were raised Unitarian because my father was from a 100% Jewish background and my mother Presbyterian. They loved us so much and we celebrated Christmas in a big way. There were lights, gifts and a big tree filling the room with excitement. We also lit a menorah on the dining room table, remembering the story of Hanukkah. Our home was a blend of both traditions. Culturally, it was beautiful. Spiritually, though, it stayed mostly on the surface. We celebrated the holidays but missed the deeper meaning of God's love behind them.

As a child, Christmas was about what I would receive. The gifts, the wrapping paper, and the excitement of something new filled the day with joy. But the thrill faded quickly. The toys grew old, and the gifts lost their shine. What remained, though I did not realize it then, was a longing for something lasting and real.

Romans 12 reminds us what lasting love looks like. Love must be sincere. It is not shallow or temporary. Real love is not about performance or appearance. It is about devotion, humility and action. God calls us to cling to what is good, to be devoted to one another in love and to honor others above ourselves. That kind of love reflects the heart of God, who showed us perfect love through Jesus.

The beauty of both Christmas and Hanukkah is the story of light shining in the darkness. Hanukkah celebrates the miracle of the oil that did not run out, while Christmas celebrates the Light of the World who never goes out. In both stories, God meets His people in their need. Through Jesus, that light and love became personal.

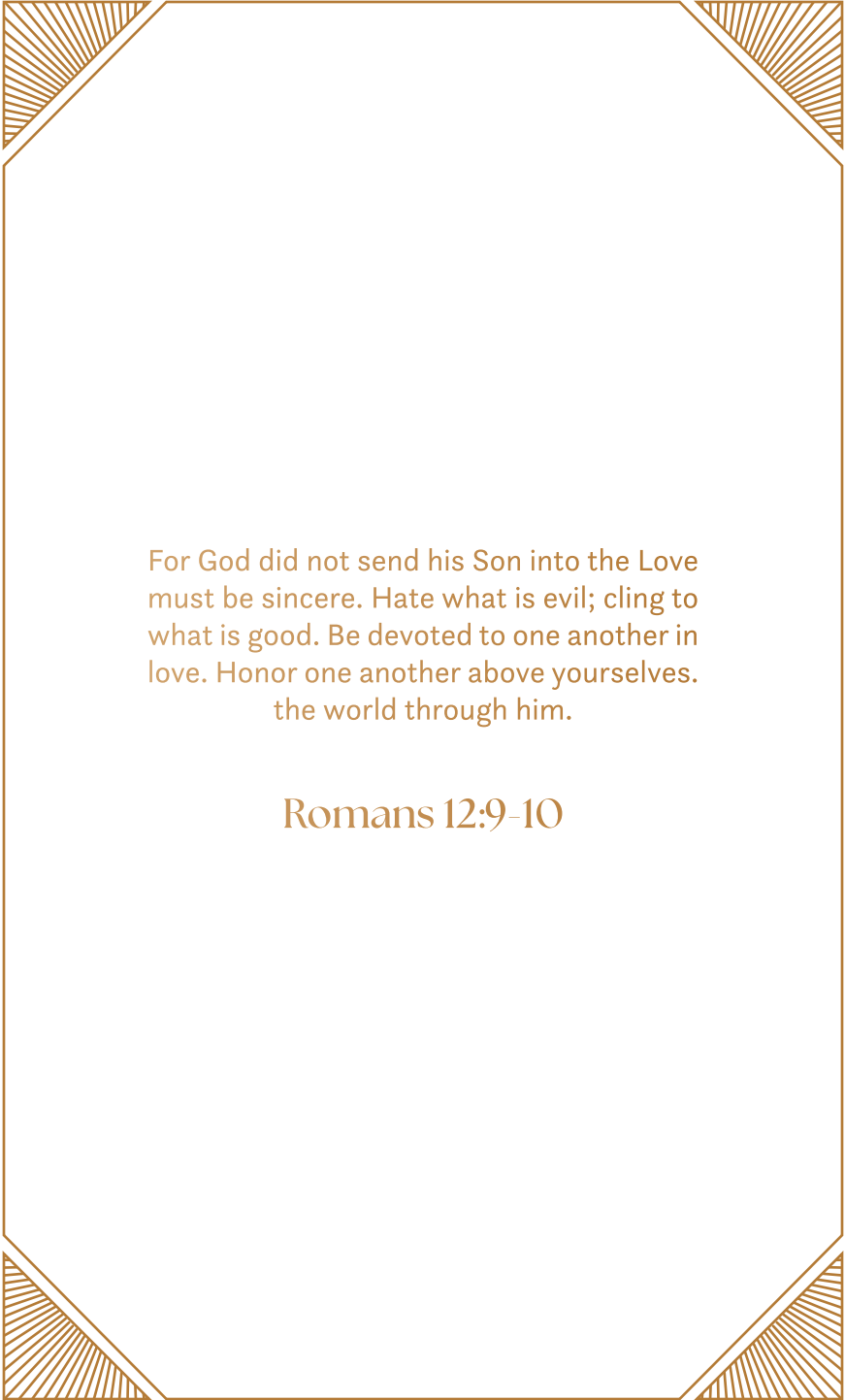
God's love is sincere. It does not fade like wrapping paper or lose its joy after we are bored with the toys. It is steady, selfless, and sacrificial. When we receive that love, it changes how we live. We begin to love sincerely, to cling to what is good and to honor those around us as deeply loved by God.

Take a moment, close your eyes, and thank God for His love. Thank Him for sending Jesus, the greatest gift of all.

Let that love fill your heart this season so you can share it freely with everyone around you.

Heavenly Father, thank You for showing us what sincere love looks like through Jesus. Help us to love in the sacrificial way you loved us. Teach us to cling to what is good and turn away from what is evil. Show us how to honor others above ourselves, just as Christ humbled Himself for us. Let Your love shape our words, actions, and relationships this season and every day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Written by Chad Schapiro



For God did not send his Son into the Love
must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to
what is good. Be devoted to one another in
love. Honor one another above yourselves.
the world through him.

Romans 12:9-10

